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falling is like this

by [Barrhorn](#)

Summary

"Angela's been with Overwatch since the very beginning; as the organization's shining angel she's been a beacon of peace and healing - the embodiment for everything Overwatch stands for and such a prominent figure draws many people's eyes both from within and outside the organization. And why wouldn't they? Angela is kind and careful and determined and has the spine that somebody in her position desperately needs. But Angela's biggest fault is the one she lets nobody see - she refuses to let herself rely on anyone, be close to and therefore weak for anybody but herself. Show me somebody finally getting through to her, letting her be human for once and have somebody taking care of her."

Needing No Introductions

Angela sat at her desk, reorganizing things for the fourth time. It wasn't like her to be this nervous before a new recruit's intake exam, and she desperately needed to regain control. She liked to meet the newest members of Overwatch at the exam, rather than the more informal meetings that the original team had. It established herself first and foremost in their minds as a professional, their doctor, an expert in her field. Being their friend and comrade came later, but that first impression meant a lot.

She'd feel guiltier about the manipulation if it didn't work so well. So far she'd had a lot fewer... complications than in the old days. Back when Jack was the unfaltering gentleman, holding open doors for her, quick with a smile and a wink. His crush had been cute but ultimately harmless; their flirtations never went past that point and he took her rejections with good grace.

Gabriel had been more insistent. Never forceful, never crossing the line, but he had a knack for catching her alone and breaching her personal space. There were times when she liked the open appreciation he had for her, those glances that lingered on her legs, but he too was rejected, always laughing it off with a "maybe next time then."

Really, there were few members of Overwatch that hadn't hit on her at one point or another, and that was ignoring all of those she worked with outside of the organization. She'd kept them all at arm's reach; had to, for their sake and hers. She was the doctor, and in a hospital she'd never be allowed to work on her friends or family. She needed to stay detached, able to make the correct decisions without her own emotions getting in the way. She needed to be able to hold their hearts in her hands without falter, or amputate when necessary. That distance had let her save Genji's life, even knowing what it would cost him.

She cared for them, of course she did, but enough of them slipped in past her defenses that the fall of Overwatch had nearly killed her with grief. Testifying at the trials had been a slow torture, every word of her failure a piece of glass that ripped a new hole in her heart. When she had rejoined Overwatch at Winston's insistence, she had vowed to herself that she would provide them with the best of care without ever letting herself be so vulnerable again.

And that brought her to the day's unusually difficult recruit, the one that had her off balance before they'd even met. Fareeha Amari was arriving at the base today, finally getting her chance with the organization after years of waiting.

Maybe she would be nothing like her mother, Angela thought. She couldn't handle another ghost walking the halls.

"Excuse me, Doctor. I hope I'm not too early?"

Verdammt. The accent was the same, and a certain steel to the tone, that of one used to giving orders and having them obeyed. But where Ana's voice had been hoarse from years of shouting, the voice in her doorway was smooth and quiet.

The similarity only strengthened when Angela turned to her visitor, who stood easily at parade rest just outside her door, dressed fully in motorcycle leathers. Her features were instantly recognizable, though her jaw was little stronger, the lips a slightly different shape. That familiar tattoo threw Angela, almost like a sudden case of vertigo, mirrored as it was.

"Not at all," Angela said as she rose, voice revealing none of that inner turmoil. "You must be Fareeha Amari."

The woman stiffened, back straightening and shoulders tensing. Her eyes darkened and turned distant. In a flash, she'd gone from an easygoing visitor to professional soldier.

And what caused that then? All Angela had done was call her by name. The answer came to her just as quickly as she thought the question: *it must be her mother*. The same thing that bothered Angela had to be affecting Ana's daughter. Her shadow hung over both of them.

Angela shook her head with a small, apologetic smile. "I'm sorry," she said, trying to put Fareeha back at ease. "I forget how difficult it is to be the newest member of the team. Everyone knows you on sight simply because you're new, while you don't know anyone. Can we start again? I'm Angela Ziegler." She held her hand out as Fareeha did relax, taking her hand in a firm shake and smiling like she didn't need the introduction either. She probably didn't.

"Fareeha Amari, as you guessed."

"It is in my appointment book. Come on in, sit on the table."

She turned back to her desk, gathering the things as she heard the rustle of paper that announced Fareeha's following of her instructions. "Now, as to why you're here: being underground as we are, we can't exactly request your medical records. So we're just here to establish a baseline and get some general knowledge. Anything I should know about? Any asthma, autoimmune disease, previous injuries...?"

"I'm a quadruple amputee."

That got Angela's attention, and she quickly turned back to Fareeha, who was watching her reaction with a small smile. "I'm sorry?"

"I lost both my legs in service," Fareeha explained, lifting up one pant leg to expose the prosthetic hiding underneath. "Military refused to give me anything but a desk job even with these and rehab. Helix Securities offered me a place in the Raptora program, but the suit requires the pilot to have prosthetic limbs. All of them." She shrugged.

"That can't have been as easy as you're saying," Angela said gently.

Fareeha shrugged again. "They offered me the chance to fly."

Angela's still sure it was a more complicated decision, but she could understand. Didn't her Valkyrie suit give her a taste of the same thing? She noticed Fareeha smiling at her reaction and gave herself a mental shake. "Well, I'm sure that the Helix facilities gave you excellent care. But rest assured that we have plenty of experience with various prosthetics ourselves."

"Oh, I will. I came here for the best in the world, after all."

Angela wasn't sure she trusted her patient's overly innocent expression, but there was nothing else there to go on. Maybe she really had misread a flirtatious tone into that comment.

Certainly there was nothing there when Fareeha removed her jacket to let Angela continue the routine tests. No smiles or winks or pithy comments as Angela moved her stethoscope along Fareeha's chest and back. Just closed eyes and the deep breaths she asked for.

"Thank you, Fareeha. That's everything I need today," she said as she wrote the last notes on the chart. "Feel free to hop down. I'll probably see you at dinner; I warn you, they usually make a big deal of someone new joining."

"As long as they don't force me to sing in front of everyone," Fareeha answered with a smile, pulling her jacket back on but leaving it unzipped. "Thanks for the heads up, Doctor." She gave a small, two finger salute to Angela, then strode out of the room without a backwards glance.

Angela shook her head at herself over her earlier concerns. Fareeha's formality despite Angela's use of her first name and her easy dismissal meant that Angela really had been reading too much into one comment. The manipulation had worked. Again.

Fareeha turned the corner of the hallway, then paused to let out a slow breath. She'd known Angela Ziegler's name and reputation, had seen her pictures, but none of that had prepared her for the doctor's sheer presence. Fareeha had never been so instantly drawn to anyone before, but she had seen how Angela started to close herself off at the first sign of flirtation.

She was going to be in so much trouble with this one.

Another deep breath, and Fareeha continued on her way. She'd waited years for this chance with Overwatch. There was a lot she had to do before she was settled in and had proved herself as worthy of being here. On her own merits, and not just for her mother's memory. Only then would she allow herself to be distracted by a certain blonde doctor.

Following Orders

Several weeks passed without incident. Even the missions went as smoothly as possible, the various members of Overwatch coming through with only minor injuries. Nothing that really even required her nanotechnology, but Angela used it anyway, wanting to ensure that everything healed as quickly and as smoothly as possible.

Fareeha, Angela noticed, slipped into Overwatch as if she had always been there. She didn't seem to become fast friends with anyone, but she smiled through Lena's constant chatter, answered all of Hana's questions, hung openly on Reinhardt's every word. Even Hanzo had some sort of stoic mutual respect thing going on with her; though Angela couldn't recall ever seeing them actually speak to each other, she had seen them eating together in companionable silence. Ana Amari had been loud and boisterous, capable of taking over a room at a moment's notice. Fareeha instead carried herself with a quiet confidence that everyone responded well to, that had her callsign rising readily to their lips even in the heat of battle.

Even her own.

Having "Pharah" in the sky changed things dramatically for Angela. She had designed the Valkyrie suit's wings to let her move more freely across the battlefield, but Fareeha opened up the whole area to her. Up on the rooftops or hovering in midair she could keep an eye on all of her charges, gliding without impediment to their side if needed. In times of danger, when Talon forces ambushed them, she had a place to escape to, and she was rarely left alone.

"Pharah," she'd called into the communicator once last mission, voice overly sweet, smiling to herself as she was answered with an exaggerated sigh.

"On my way."

The hum of engines had announced Pharah's arrival as she landed on the closest flat rooftop, saluting Mercy as she flew up to meet her. "I'm going to paint my suit like a taxi if you keep doing this," Pharah had murmured for her ears alone, and Angela's laugh had been carried away by the wind.

Despite their banter on the field, Angela hadn't spent much time with Fareeha outside of their missions. In some ways it was a relief that Fareeha didn't take their battlefield camaraderie as an invitation for anything more. But at times when they passed in the hall and Fareeha only offered her a nod and a quiet "Doctor Ziegler", Angela would remember the smile hidden under the visor and wish she dared strike up a friendship with the younger woman.

But it's better this way, she told herself, and knew it was the right decision.

—

After knocking briskly on the door, Angela didn't wait for a response before slipping into the conference room that they used for all their briefings. "I'm sorry if I kept you waiting," she said easily, turning to the room's only other occupant.

"You didn't," Jack said. "And we're still missing our last person."

"But your message—" Had said that he wanted to meet with her, and hadn't mentioned anyone else at all. Her objection was interrupted by another knock at the door, however, and Angela bit the words back.

"Come in," Jack called, and the door opened on Fareeha.

"I came as soon as I heard," she said, chest rising and falling rapidly, still dressed in running shorts and a t-shirt, her exposed prosthetics gleaming softly against her skin. She took a seat on one of the folding chairs when Jack waved a hand at it, Angela following suit a moment later with some

trepidation.

“I’m not going to beat around the bush here,” Jack said when they were all settled. “You both know you work well together out in the field. You two have unique skills - and suits - that complement each other. You’re good. You could be great.”

Angela shot Jack a glare. What was he *doing*?

“I’m going to demand great,” he continued, ignoring her. “I’m going to demand perfection. You,” and the visor swung unmistakably in Fareeha’s direction, “will know where Angela is at all times. You will learn to fly and dodge and shoot without ever leaving her behind or exposing her to unnecessary danger.”

Fareeha nodded but said nothing, her eyebrows drawn together, lips turned down into a small frown. Angela couldn’t tell if she disapproved or was simply concentrating.

“And you,” Jack said, facing her now, “will learn to fly with Fareeha, to anticipate her moves and react to them before they happen. If you two become as good as I think you will - as you should - we’ll teach you both how to fly one of the smaller transports and give you your own missions. Just the two of you.”

Jack paused, folding his hands on the table in front of him, looking between them.

“You want a strike team,” Fareeha said slowly, leaning back in her chair and folding her arms over her chest. “Small, fast moving, precise.”

“Exactly,” Jack confirmed. “We’ve gotten reports of unguarded Talon warehouses, but by the time we can respond they’re completely covered. We could be fighting fewer battles and getting a lot more done.” He turned to Angela, no doubt worried by her continued silence. She could see it in his tense shoulders; she knew him too well for that visor to completely close him off to her.

“And if Fareeha can protect you on her own-“ Fareeha shifted as if to protest, then looked away.

“-And can get you out of a tight spot, we can send you out on more relief missions. Let you go work with the injured wherever there’s trouble.”

“Good for PR?” she asked, a little more sharply than intended. It was a tempting offer; she’d asked to be dispatched in the wake of several attacks, always being denied. They couldn’t commit a large group just for aid purposes, Jack always told her. It would leave them too vulnerable in other areas.

“And the right thing to do,” he said, tone gentle, and for a moment they were ten years younger and Overwatch was still a shining beacon for the world.

Then the universe snapped back into place and Angela curled one hand into a fist on her lap.

“Let me remind you what the stakes are,” he continued. “You two will be out there on your own. We’ll have communication but no backup. If we lose Fareeha, you’re completely exposed, Angela. And we’ve lost a great soldier, a good tactician, a strategic advantage, and your greatest ally.”

Her jaw clenched painfully tight on all the things that she wanted to say: that she knew all of that. That she wouldn’t lose another patient. That she would not allow Fareeha to die.

But Jack’s visor was already turned toward Fareeha, her own face grim. “If we lose Angela,” he told her, “we lose Overwatch.”

Chair legs scraped against the floor as Angela shot to her feet. “Jack! That’s-“ Ridiculous. Absurd. Unwelcome. Terrifying.

The unexpected feeling of cool metal against her arm startled her out of her outburst, turning to see Fareeha also standing, her fingers gently holding Angela’s bicep. She wished she could read Fareeha’s eyes, but she couldn’t identify the feelings she saw flicker through them; Fareeha’s thoughts remained for her alone.

"There's no one else like you," Jack said simply. "You let us continue as we are."

As if her presence had been able to stop the previous fall of Overwatch! How could he say that so damn calmly when he still bore the scars of her failure? "I'm no more important than anyone else." She hated the implications of Jack's evaluations. If Fareeha died so that she could live, she would never be able to bear the guilt.

"Don't worry."

Fareeha's sure voice cut through the torrent of Angela's thoughts. Fingers squeezed her arm in reassurance, then dropped away once Angela met Fareeha's eyes again. "He's not saying I'm expendable, because I'm *not*." Though Fareeha's face was calm, her voice was ironclad, and Angela took heart at the words and Jack's small nod. "He's just being honest about the mission priorities." She smiled, barely, just an upturned corner of her lip and a lightening of her eyes. "It's a soldier thing."

Angela still wanted to protest, but Jack was practically radiating approval.

"I want you two to start training together as soon as possible," he said. "Try to find time for it, no matter how busy you are."

She knew one of his dismissals when she heard it. She turned and strode out of the room without further comment. She had nothing to say to him anyway.

She didn't get very far down the hallway before she was hailed. "Dr. Ziegler, may I have a moment?"

Pausing and looking back, she saw Fareeha jog the last of the distance between them, waiting politely for Angela's response. Behind her, she could see the door to the conference room open, and felt a sudden rush of revulsion. She didn't want to see Jack right now, not after he'd sprung this on her. She should've earned enough respect that he would consult her before pulling something like this!

He was afraid you'd run away from it. Like you're doing right now, a small part of her said, and Angela turned her back on the door. "Walk with me?" she asked Fareeha, starting off without waiting.

But Fareeha fell into step easily with her, remaining silent as they walked toward the medical wing, the loud click of Angela's heels against the floor setting the pace. Her companion's looming presence could have been ominous or irritating; instead Angela let herself be soothed by Fareeha's constant composure. When they reached her office she barely hesitated. "Why don't you come inside."

Her office was her sanctuary, and Angela breathed a little easier as she passed the threshold.

"What did you need?"

Fareeha cocked an eyebrow at her, polite disbelief written across her face. "I wanted to talk about what just happened."

She retreated behind her desk, resting her hands on the back of her chair. "I'm not sure what there is to discuss."

"We agreed to follow orders," Fareeha said, almost gently. "That's not the same as agreeing to work together."

Angela stared at her hands, unsure of how to respond. What did Fareeha want her to say?

After a moment of her silence, Fareeha sighed. "You know, he did say he'll only send us when we're ready. If you hate it, we can fail any tests we're given." She shrugged. "The visor does cut into my peripheral vision. If I clipped you they'd never let us go."

"You don't seem like the type to be content with failing," Angela said, words sharp, her eyes on Fareeha sharper.

"You don't seem like the type to do something she doesn't want to," Fareeha retorted, unfazed.

She straightened, anger setting her shoulders. “And if I don’t, I will tell him so. Without needing to resort to some trick.”

“Good.” Fareeha’s voice was crisp, but not upset. In fact, she met Angela’s eyes with another of those barely visible smiles. “I’m glad you’re willing to give it a try.”

All at once the tension drained out of Angela’s body; it wasn’t fair for her to take out her frustration with Jack on Fareeha. They did make a good team, and Angela even enjoyed working with her. “I’m sorry that you’ve been stuck babysitting.” She knew that Fareeha wouldn’t push so far forward if she was responsible for Angela’s safety as well. She wouldn’t be able to take the same risks, perform the same almost daredevil acrobatics that she was capable of. Ana had lived for the adrenaline rush, finding every battle a thrill.

But the corners of Fareeha’s eyes wrinkled, giving away her amusement. “I think you have that the wrong way round, Doctor.” Then she sobered, and Angela was unprepared for the honesty in her face. “I didn’t join the military because I like to fight. But someone has to, and that someone should be capable and willing, and I am both. I want to protect the innocent. I joined Helix because I couldn’t do that from behind a desk; I joined Overwatch because I could do more. If we spend all of our time away from the front lines, I will be content, just as long as we are doing *something*.” She paused, hesitant, seeming almost embarrassed.

The trouble was, Angela believed every word. “I understand,” she said quietly. They’d both lost family and friends, both made great personal sacrifices, and yet here they were, standing in a run down watch point in the middle of nowhere because they still had something to give. Fareeha smiled at her, relief and gratitude worn clearly. “So what do you say? Care to protect the skies with me?”

The question was earnest, honest, said with no trace of self-mockery or self consciousness. Angela liked the sound of it. She wouldn’t be just some mission priority, but a partner. “Yes,” she said without thinking about it. “That sounds wonderful.”

Fareeha’s smile grew, and she ducked her head in acknowledgement. “Then I will see you tomorrow.” With a little wave, she left Angela’s office.

The mood faded with her departure, and Angela sunk into her chair. Without one of Fareeha’s half smiles to disarm her defenses, the idea of working so closely together was as alarming as it was appealing. She’d just have to be on her guard. She could do this.

Somehow.

Falling

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When she walked into the training area, she immediately spotted Fareeha standing in the middle of the field, unmistakable in her bright blue and gold. Her helmet was tucked under one arm, her hair blown about gently by the breeze. It's a moment made for the recruitment posters, and Angela was almost sorry to intrude upon it. But Fareeha noticed her, waved her over with one hand while tucking stray hairs behind her ear with the other.

"Honestly," Angela said by way of greeting as she walked over, "I haven't thought about how to do this."

"I was thinking we'd start with the simplest things," Fareeha answered. "Just basic movement, figuring out some limits of the suits, that sort of thing."

"Then shall we begin?"

She might not have said it so cheerfully if she'd realized how exhausting "the basics" could be. Her shoulders and back ached from the constant pull of her wings' small thrusters that were being sorely overworked - how much ground could she cover in one go, what was the top speed of the Raptora that she could keep up with, where exactly did Fareeha have to stand for Angela to make it up to a rooftop with her? She couldn't even imagine what Fareeha must feel like right now with the heavier Raptora jets constantly blasting her through the air. She'd miscalculated her fuel consumption twice, each time landing heavily on her feet, her armor rattling with the impact and making Angela wince.

They were working on more movement, Angela following Fareeha as she weaved through the air, trying to match their turns as smoothly as possible when Fareeha suddenly turned too quickly, the Valkyrie suit straining to follow. A rush of air, the wake of the Raptora jets, buffeted Angela, turning her-

and her wings stalled and failed.

A scream tore itself from her throat as she plummeted, a wide-eyed reaction of pure fear before instinct took over and she tried to angle herself to catch the wind, had to do something, had to somehow get her wings to catch the air, *why wouldn't the thrusters work-*

Blue flashed in her vision and something wrapped around her wrist, the roaring in her ears not the wind but the Raptora's engines as Fareeha grabbed her and pulled her into her arms, feathering the jets to slow their descent rather than stop them all at once.

When they landed, softly, Angela had her arms wrapped around Fareeha's neck, pressing forward into the reassuring solidness of the armor. "I'm sorry," Fareeha was saying, arms still tight around Angela, "I didn't realize you were so close. Are you okay? I'm so sorry." She was almost babbling, and Angela shut her up by hugging her closer, not entirely sure she trusted her legs to hold her own weight at the moment.

"It's okay, I'm fine," she answered automatically. "Just... a little rattled." Pulling back a little to try and convince Fareeha of her honesty, she caught a glimpse of Fareeha's expression. The soldier looked as distressed as Angela had felt. "See?"

"I-" Fareeha hesitated, then seemed to realize how closely they were still entwined. Her arms loosened as she started to draw away, and Angela let her go with reluctance, her trembling muscles missing the support as soon as Fareeha stepped back. "I think that's enough for today." "I think you're right." She managed a smile, wondering if it looked as shaky as the rest of her. But

though Fareeha's gaze lingered on her face, she eventually nodded and turned back toward the base. But she let Angela take the first few steps, falling in behind her.

Trusting her not to fall, but there to catch her if she did.

Exhaustion dragged her eyes closed, and Angela fought them open again, trying desperately not to fall asleep in her dinner. For one, it might alarm her fellow agents who were gathered around the table with her, and it might offend Mei since she'd gone to the trouble to make dinner for everyone.

Bless Mei. After removing her Valkyrie suit and storing it in the hangar, Angela had disappeared to her room, taking a long shower to try and soak her aches away. She'd braced both hands against the wall and shook as the last of the adrenaline from her close call faded, then had stuck her head directly under the stream of water as she remembered how good Fareeha's arms had felt around her. She'd barely gotten dressed - hadn't even bothered to dry her hair - before collapsing into bed, and might not have left the room again if Mei hadn't knocked on her door.

"Hey Fareeha! Want a hand?"

Lena's cheerful question drew Angela's attention away from her plate and over to the doorway. She'd wondered about Fareeha's absence from the table, but one look explained Fareeha's delayed arrival and froze Angela in place.

The soldier was seated in a wheelchair, both her prosthetic legs off, her gym shorts not quite covering her stumps. Fareeha released the wheels after she was safely through the door, holding up her hands at Lena with a grin. "Nah, I still got two." Her eyes shifted over to meet Angela's, her grin becoming something sharper. "What do you think, doc?"

Are you alright were the words that came immediately to mind, but one look at the challenge in Fareeha's face convinced Angela that was not a good response. "I think you can lift me with one hand," she said without really thinking, remembering Fareeha's fingers around her arm in the air. "Dinner shouldn't be a problem."

Fareeha's expression softened, one of those little smiles Angela was growing to know so well curling across her lips. Her eyes brightened with mischief, never leaving Angela's as she slowly reached over to her left arm and detached the prosthetic there. "Let's test that," she said, then offered the prosthetic to Lucio. "Hold that a second, would you?"

He was saved by the laughter that erupted around the table, and Fareeha reattached her arm, smoothly maneuvering through the room to the space that Aleksandra made by shoving a chair away from the table. "As I was saying before," the Russian said, "there was this bear-"

After staying behind to help clean up, Angela was heading back to her room when a light in one of the common rooms caught her attention. Intending on just saying goodnight before returning to her bed, she pushed the door further open.

And of course, of course, it was Fareeha sitting on the couch, her wheelchair locked in place nearby. Why couldn't it have been Hana, who would've ignored Angela for her handheld game? Instead Fareeha's eyes, so dark in the lamplight, found hers immediately.

She should walk away. Just say goodnight as planned and leave. But she couldn't.

Stepping inside, she offered Fareeha a small smile. "I hope I'm not bothering you."

“Not at all,” Fareeha said, leaning back into the couch. “Are you finally surrendering to your doctorly instincts after resisting so well at dinner?” The words were teasing, with no real bite to them, and so Angela just tipped her head to one side, surveying Fareeha.

“I just know how much I hurt. If you’re as sore as I am, you’ll know that all the hot water in the base isn’t enough.”

Fareeha’s teeth flashed in a real grin, obviously pleased by Angela’s retort. “So that’s why there was none left for me.”

Angela waited out Fareeha’s laughter, settling on the other side of the couch. “Are you okay?” she asked.

“Yeah. Just absorbed a lot of punishment.” Fareeha rubbed her shoulder as she stared at her legs; Angela wondered if she even realized what she was doing. “As good as these things are, wearing them constantly is a lot of stress on the joints where they connect.” She seemed to remember who her companion was, looking over with an apologetic shrug. “As well you know.”

“I’m still glad you told me.”

An easy silence filled the room, and Angela tried to hide a yawn. Judging by the twitch of Fareeha’s lips, she hadn’t succeeded very well. “I was thinking about today,” she said. “We need another way to communicate.”

“I agree.”

Angela nodded. “It’s too hard to hear each other over the wind and the jets, and we’ll drive everyone crazy if we’re on the communicators all the time.”

Fareeha’s hum held entirely too much amusement in it for the topic they were discussing, but when Angela glanced over Fareeha wasn’t even looking at her, fingers restlessly tapping her leg as she thought. “Maybe something like hand signals?” she started before being interrupted by a yawn of her own. “Why don’t we discuss it later? I’m not thinking straight right now.”

“Neither am I,” Angela admitted, slowly rising to her feet. She hesitated, but after the way dinner started, she doubted Fareeha would welcome any offer to help her back into her wheelchair. So making her way to the door, she paused at the door much like she had earlier. *See?* she told herself. *That wasn’t so bad.* “Good night, Fareeha,” she said and stepped into the hallway.

“Sleep well, Angela,” followed after her, the three syllables of her name sending a delightful shiver down her spine. Pretending she hadn’t heard, she all but fled back to her room.

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Once the door was safely locked behind her, Angela poured herself a glass of wine and curled up in her room’s window seat, the window open to the night air and the sky full of stars. She sighed as she brought the glass up to her lips, the quiet ritual soothing her as always.

And alcohol was a great muscle relaxant, which should help her aching body. It just couldn’t do a thing to change how Fareeha Amari affected her.

When had Angela stopped thinking of Ana first? It was normal and healthy, she knew, to focus on her living, very real, very present companion instead of the one who had died seven years ago. But everything had become Fareeha’s voice, Fareeha’s eyes, Fareeha’s tattoo. Fareeha’s hand at the small of her back to steady her when they landed together.

When had Fareeha gotten to her without Angela even realizing?

She groaned lightly, pressing the glass to her forehead as she replayed their last conversation. In hindsight was she reading too much into Fareeha’s little comment about “not thinking straight” or had she really intended the double meaning?

Angela wasn’t sure which one would be worse.

She was certain that she only had two options at this point: she could accept that she found Fareeha desperately attractive and let things continue on the way they had been. She could start flirting with Fareeha, start returning all her little touches. Hell, she could finish this glass of wine and maybe the remaining half a bottle and go over to Fareeha's room right now. Finding out what her lips tasted of and hearing her name moaned in that damn voice would be worth the lost sleep.

Herrgott that was a tempting thought, and, closing her eyes, Angela deliberately lowered the wineglass until it dangled at her side.

Because doing any of those things meant accepting the consequences. Meant fear every time Fareeha was sent on a mission. Meant worrying more than usual whenever they worked together, having to guard her own actions to make sure she properly took care of everyone instead of focusing too much on Fareeha. Meant having one more person to fail.

Meant a hundred more ways to have her heart torn out again.

Or she could put her foot down and stop this before it went any further. She could. Freezing Fareeha out would hurt, but the pain would be temporary. It would hurt Fareeha too, but the woman was a professional and a soldier. Surely she'd dealt with the issue of fraternization before. Surely she'd also realize it was for the best.

Which it was. Not that it made the decision any easier.

You don't seem like the type to do something she doesn't want to, Fareeha's voice came back to her unbidden. Angela drained the rest of the glass and leaned her head back against the wall, leaving the window open as rain started to fall.

—

"Good morning, Angela," Fareeha's warm voice swept over her as Angela tried to ignore the way it shot straight to her stomach. "Want to continue where we left off yesterday?"

Angela's eyes flicked up to Fareeha's, then just as quickly back down the hallway. "Not today. I have some things that I need to attend to. If you'll excuse me." She didn't wait for a response before continuing down the hall to her office, though she could feel Fareeha's eyes watching her the whole way, even as she slipped inside.

Though she didn't normally, this time she locked the door behind her.

Chapter End Notes

The meme prompt was inspired by this post:

<http://superrisu.tumblr.com/post/146620211268/i-imagine-a-lot-of-the-ow-members-probably-had-a>

and the poster requested that the art be referenced in the fic! So though I didn't match it exactly, that is where the visual for Angela in her room came from!

(I don't have a tumblr but if you do you should follow superrisu. Go do that.)

Grounded

Angela glanced at the clock on her desk and rubbed her eyes. Just a little past dinnertime, and she was just about ready for a break. Plus, she was getting sick of her office; she'd spent most of the past three days in here, had even slept on the couch last night. And yes, the research she was doing was that important and yes, it was that hard to walk away when chasing that shiver of inspiration that had gotten her to Chief of Surgery and Overwatch, but also yes, she was avoiding several of her coworkers.

Well, one in particular, but considering Lena and Jesse wouldn't leave her alone about her sudden solitude either-

A knock at the door pulled her out of her rapidly circling thoughts, and she froze in her seat. Even if she'd been contemplating leaving her office, she'd been hoping to slip through the halls unnoticed. She didn't want to deal with anyone right now. Especially not one of the people who would seek her out there. A call for a mission or medical emergency would've come over the comms-

"Open the door," called the person on the other side of the door, and Angela's heart sank. Really, she should've expected that Fareeha wouldn't allow Angela to brush her off so easily. *What am I going to do?*

"You need to open the door sometime," Fareeha continued, her voice pitched just loud enough for Angela to be able to hear it clearly through the door. "If that's ten hours from now I will be here."

Could she really be that stubborn? Angela wondered, then immediately sighed. *Yes.*

"Normally I'd have better things to do with my time, but my training partner is avoiding me."
"A moment, please," Angela called in response, then leaned back in her chair, closing her eyes and taking a few deep breaths. *It's fine*, she told the anxious flutter in her stomach. She knew she could deal with whatever Fareeha threw at her even on her worst day; she'd just wanted to have this conversation on her own terms. But even less did she want someone wandering by and wondering why Fareeha was holding a conversation with her door.

But now that the surprise had had a moment to fade, she felt calmer, more in control, and rose from her seat and opened the door in a smooth motion, confident that her expression didn't give her away.

Despite that, she couldn't help the way her shoulders relaxed when Fareeha made no move to enter the office and greeted her with a simple "Doctor Ziegler." Nor could she do anything about the way Fareeha's lips thinned when she noticed her reaction.

Fareeha offered her a small cloth bag, her movements so crisp that Angela wondered if she'd restrained herself from shoving it in her arms. "It's your business if you want to hide in your research all day," Fareeha said, her voice flat. "But you've been skipping meals. If having food in here will let you eat, then here."

Anger and embarrassment crept up Angela's neck, heating the skin there. If only Fareeha had come to her empty-handed or accusing, then she could allow herself to be angry, to tell her that damn right it was none of her business and close the door on her. Instead she swallowed back the words. Carefully she nodded and said "thank you," and even more carefully she took the bag, making sure their fingers didn't brush in the exchange. She glanced inside, spotting water, oranges, protein bars - enough to keep her going but definitely nothing to replace a meal. She wondered how deliberate that was.

Fareeha stood there silently, her eyes fixed on Angela until the doctor had to turn away. Her fingers tightened on the door, wondering if she could ask Fareeha to leave and still salvage any kind of working relationship with her.

“You need to take care of yourself.”

Angela’s head jerked up, her eyes finding Fareeha’s quickly. That was not what she had expected to hear.

“You could be putting yourself and your teammates at risk,” Fareeha continued. “If you’d been part of my squad at Helix you’d be grounded right now.”

Unexpectedly, unwillingly, Angela felt a smile tug at her lips and had to fight it back. Fareeha’s stern disciplinarian tone and the use of that word made her sound too much like a mother scolding her child.

Noticing Angela’s reaction again, Fareeha sighed, an exasperated sound that said she’d heard it all before. “Unable to fly. Off the mission,” she clarified.

“Is that all?” Now that the humor of the moment had faded, there was nothing appealing about being chided in her office doorway.

Fareeha considered her for a long moment, and this time Angela’s gaze remained steady. She was not the intruder here! “I’m telling Jack to call off his program,” Fareeha finally said.

“What? Why?” Her hands clenched, one going white knuckled on the door, the bag’s straps biting into the palm of the other, surprising herself with the strength of her reaction.

Gesturing to the space between them, Fareeha answered with disbelief staining every word. “Do you really think we would be capable?”

“You don’t?” Fareeha had never been anything but confident in herself, in battle and out, more sure and controlled than many even when she’d been in the wheelchair. Angela could feel herself tensing. If Fareeha thought they couldn’t handle it, she must be doubting Angela.

Fareeha raked a hand through her hair, shifting her weight, her stance widening a bit. “We’ve worked well together in the past,” she said, though Angela could hear the *but not now* as clearly as if she’d shouted it, “but we’ve only trained with each other once, and it nearly ended in disaster. Now that might be enough for what Jack has planned, but—”

Her mouth went dry. “What plan?”

Fareeha stopped. “He hasn’t talked to you?” At Angela’s mute shake of her head, she added, “When was the last time you saw him?”

Silence. She’d avoided Jack since he’d proposed the idea.

Fareeha sighed, crossing her arms over her chest. “He’s been keeping an eye on this one place, thinks it might be a Talon safe house. He wants us to spend a week or two out there observing it. Recon only. Low risk of fighting or any danger.”

“What?” A week *or two*?

Fareeha nodded at the dismay in Angela’s voice. “Do you really think we could handle a mission like that on our own? For that long?”

She wasn’t sure, or at least, she was certain that she’d rather not find out. Not now, not this soon. Fareeha didn’t give her much time to answer before her arms fell to her sides and her shoulders slumped. “Because I don’t think we could,” she said quietly, and for a moment there was an exhaustion in her eyes that frightened Angela. “Not if I have to force you to open the door for me.” She turned to leave, and the sight of her back made Angela find her voice.

“Wait, please.”

Fareeha stilled but hesitated, and when she finally turned back toward Angela her movements were heavy with reluctance. Angela chewed the inside of her cheek as she met Fareeha’s eyes again. She’d known this was going to be painful for both of them; maybe she should’ve let her go. It would’ve been easier.

But it'd been easier to hide in her office, and look where that had gotten them. And Angela couldn't shake the feeling that Fareeha leaving right now would damage things beyond repair. "Don't talk to Jack just yet," she said, but she could hear how her voice lifted on the last syllable, turning it partway into a question.

"Will you come to training?" Clearly Fareeha's response to her request hinged on Angela's answer.

"I do have a deadline for this article," Angela said, stepping forward into the hall when Fareeha began to withdraw. "But if I push, I could finish it tonight. Is tomorrow okay?"

She found she was holding her breath as Fareeha watched her, eyes sharp on her face. Angela didn't waver or look away, feeling like Fareeha was testing her, seeing if she could trust her. "Don't push," Fareeha finally said. "And eat something." With that, she turned and walked away. This time Angela let her go.

—

When she got to the training field the next day, Angela spotted Fareeha already in the sky and had to swallow back guilt when she noticed how the Raptora suit was only going three-quarters speed, about the max that Angela could keep up with. She stopped to watch, noticing the broad strokes that Fareeha painted in the sky, the gentle curves her suit weaved through the air, and felt a tightness in her chest.

Either Fareeha had believed she would show up, or she'd been practicing the things they'd learned before on her own.

With that thought in mind, Angela didn't hesitate before jumping into the air to join Fareeha, feeling the familiar strain of the thrusters against her shoulders as she mimicked each turn, dive and rise. After a few moments, Fareeha slowed and hovered in place, and Angela let herself glide close enough to speak, still wary of the wake from the Raptora's jets.

"You pushed," Fareeha called, and with the sound of the engines between them Angela couldn't tell if what she heard was amusement or disapproval. Maybe both.

"I had something to do," Angela answered.

Before Fareeha could respond, an alarm blared through the communicators. "We've had reports of a Talon attack," Winston announced, his voice tight. "Everyone, meet me at the hangar!"

They shared a nod when the communicators clicked off, and Fareeha flew toward the hangar, Angela following her the whole way.

—

Mercy flew back up into the hot Numbani sun, using the height to relocate her teammates. Hanzo had taken a bullet to the stomach, and she'd been by his side for some time, making sure that he was fully healed and would be fine on his own. There was Winston and D.Va, and while she couldn't see Tracer, she could hear her over the comms, checking in so that "Mom wouldn't worry," as D.Va had teased. And Pharah was currently by her side, anchoring her in the sky.

Until a roar shattered the momentary lull, and Pharah cried out in pain, dropping ten feet before catching herself, cradling her left arm against her body. Mercy immediately turned her staff on her companion, but though her ragged breathing eased and she looked up at the doctor descending slowly to her, her arm never relaxed.

"I've been hit," Pharah said, speaking over the communicator but not looking away from Mercy.

"I have to fall back."

"I'm with her," Mercy added quickly, noticing how Winston looked up and gave them a small wave of acknowledgement.

They landed several streets behind the loose line formed by their teammates, but Pharah didn't even pause when her feet touched down. "Concussion mines are done for," she murmured, and as Mercy watched in disbelief, she ejected the empty cylinder from her rocket launcher and loaded in another, her face under the visor lined with pain. "Okay," she said. "Good to go."

"You are not," Mercy said. "You just took a sniper bullet. Let me take care of you." Really, the staff should've done most of the work by now, but Pharah was still- It took her a moment and the sight of the clear fluid dripping from Pharah's arm to remind her why the staff wasn't working normally.

And Pharah just looked at her, eyes hidden by her helmet but her voice gentle. "The prosthetic was damaged, Mercy. I don't think the staff repairs those."

That Pharah was right only inflamed Mercy's sudden anger. "You rebuked me for just the possibility of fighting on an empty stomach, and now you want to go back into battle with your arm only half functional?" A jagged hole punched through the metal, the edges looking melted and bent, the steel on the other side peeled back. Who knew what had been done internally? "Half functional is good enough--"

She couldn't deal with Pharah's stubbornness right now. Mercy switched off her staff, the soldier sagging and biting back a curse as the golden light around her disappeared. "So the staff does dull the pain," Mercy said, starting up the constant stream of nanites again. "Can you be out there without it?" she demanded, "Because I can't stay with you the whole time. What if someone else gets hurt?"

"You go to them," Pharah answered, the only possible answer, not that it infuriated Mercy any less. If she could understand that, then why would she insist on going back?

"Pharah, Mercy, report."

Pharah beat her to it. "I'm fine, Winston; we'll be returning shortly."

"Good," that was Tracer's voice. "Cause we got company incoming!"

Pharah carefully flexed the fingers of her left hand. "I can do this," she said quietly. "I can't remove the arm because I can't lose those flight controls. I can't turn off the neural connections because I won't have enough dexterity left for aiming and reloading. But they need us. If you have to leave me, then you will, and I will try and stay out of trouble while you're gone."

If you have to leave me, then you will. She said it so easily, so confidently. A statement of fact, without judgment. Mercy nodded once. That was exactly the sort of distance she needed. "I reserve the right to ground you if I feel it's necessary," she said. She had to trust Pharah on this, knowing that she wasn't in any immediate danger from her injuries. She'd just have to keep an eye on her for any other complications.

"Fine," Pharah acquiesced, sounding almost amused as they returned to the sky. "And if I die foolishly, I give you permission to leave me that way."

"That I will not allow," Mercy said. "You don't get out of it that easily."

Hearing Pharah's laugh almost made things normal again, as long as Mercy ignored the mangled wires and metal of her arm.

She did have to leave Pharah, to watch over Winston and D.Va as they endured and pushed back a wave of attackers, to heal Tracer after she blinked herself away from an ambush right off a roof. Each time Pharah landed as Mercy did her rounds; each time Mercy returned to her and reengaged the staff to hear a sigh of relief. She offered no apologies, and Pharah expected none.

When Hanzo and Tracer announced the retreat of the Talon forces, Pharah immediately lowered her rocket launcher, her right hand slipping between plates of armor on her shoulder. Mercy could

hear something click, and Pharah immediately relaxed as her left arm went limp.

“I will find a better solution,” Mercy promised, fingertips just brushing the broken metal of her arm.

Pharah hesitated for a long moment before nodding reluctantly. “That would be for the best,” she admitted. “I won’t be flying until this gets fixed anyway.” She sighed. “So much for catching up on our training.”

“Actually, I have an idea about that,” Mercy replied. “Come, we’ll discuss it on the transport home.”

she says

Angela held back a sigh as Jesse added yet another ludicrous detail to his story. Granted, she didn't know - had never known - all of the things that Blackwatch had done, but the tales of his exploits had started sounding a lot like the most ridiculous action movie plots. She couldn't blame him for exaggerating to make for a better story, and there was no denying that Hana, Lucio and Lena were hanging on every word, but she only hoped that he didn't inspire them into recklessness.

Movement behind Jesse drew Angela's attention, and she looked over to see Fareeha standing in the doorway, dressed in workout clothes and with a towel slung over her shoulders. With her Raptora suit still in for repairs, she and Angela had been doing a different sort of training; to better communicate while in the air, they'd developed a sign language of their own. It was a mishmash of military hand signals courtesy of Fareeha and some of the international sign language that Angela had picked up during her travels after Overwatch's fall. Others they simply made up on their own for their own needs.

Angela waited until their eyes met before she signed, *Okay?*, her tilted head and raised eyebrow making it a question.

Okay, Fareeha signed back, and Angela smiled. They'd both been working hard on getting the hang of this form of communication, but Fareeha had been the one to call an end to today's practice, citing the need to go and clear her mind with something more physical. Fareeha stayed in the doorway for a minute longer, then signed again.

Angela shook her head, not understanding Fareeha's quick movements.

Fareeha did them again, slower. *Danger, high wind*. Then she looked at Jesse and rolled her eyes.

After a second, the meaning hit Angela, and she smothered a giggle. Jesse glanced at her, then looked behind to where Fareeha had crossed the room and was pulling a drink out of the fridge. Not even looking at the rest of the group. Absolutely innocent, as if she hadn't just called him a blowhard.

Angela continued to hide her smile until Jesse turned back to his audience and Fareeha left the room without saying anything else, out loud or otherwise. After all the struggling they'd done with the sign language, after the debates and the rewrites and the fierce memorization, it was gratifying to see it put to some use. Even if their language revolved around battle and not small talk, it was strangely intimate to have something they only they understood. The warmth it brought to her chest should've worried her, and yet Angela couldn't bring herself to mind.

—

As she walked into the common room they'd claimed for their own use, Angela came to a halt at the unusual sight waiting for her. Fareeha was seated on the couch, a notebook in her lap, a pencil in her right hand skimming across the paper in sure, confident lines. She hesitated, unsure if she should interrupt, but Fareeha glanced up at her with a small smile.

"Evening," she said, putting the pencil down.

"Good evening," Angela replied, walking over to the other end of the couch so that she could dart a glance at the notebook. Normally she took the armchair sitting on the side so they could better face each other, but she was curious! As she sat, she noticed Fareeha watching her with clear amusement before angling the sketch her way.

"I hope you weren't expecting anything exciting," Fareeha said.

Angela examined the small drawing, just the view of the room from the couch. While she didn't know that much about art, she could recognize that it wasn't the most technically correct piece;

however there was something about the pencil strokes that made Angela think this was far from Fareeha's first sketch. "I like it," she said, relaxing back into the couch. "Though I admit, I liked the idea that you'd been secretly hiding some great talent all this time."

Fareeha just smiled and shook her head, not bothered at all by Angela's assessment. "Sorry to disappoint. This is just something the Helix doctors recommended I take up when I first got the prosthetics."

"To help with dexterity and developing fine control in your fingers and wrists," Angela said, immediately understanding, her mind quickly running through everything she knew on the subject. "Though when both arms are affected, I believe they usually advise the patient to take up a musical instrument instead, to develop both at once."

"Oh, they did," Fareeha replied, amusement running deep in her voice. "But a notebook and pencil are a lot more portable than a piano."

"So you do play!"

"Mechanically."

Angela's delight at discovering all these hidden sides of the soldier dissolved into a groan, though she was smiling. "Please tell me that wasn't a pun."

"It wasn't a pun," Fareeha said complacently, her grin giving her away as Angela swatted her leg in reprimand.

They fell into an easy silence, and after a moment Angela was surprised to hear her own voice speaking. "They asked me to help improve the prosthetics after a lot of my initial research was published. I could tell you all about the things we did to improve the neural connections and make it easier for the brain to form new pathways--"

"Please don't," she heard Fareeha mutter, and she continued with a smile.

"-But I don't really know how they feel." She looked down at her own hands and her unscarred skin. "I saved Genji's life, built him almost a whole body. I knew how he needed to rehab, how to get to the point that he could walk and run and climb again." She'd been less prepared for his grief and rage, the combined traumas of his fight with his brother, his near-death, and his new body driving him to fight her nearly every step of the way. It had been a grueling process, and the memory of him yelling at her that she should've just let him die still cut deeply.

"Just a little more," she'd tried encouraging him once. "I know it's--"

"No, enough." He'd growled, the metal of the mask he'd insisted on distorting his voice terribly.

"You have no idea what this is like."

Cool metal against her skin brought Angela back to the present, where Fareeha was leaning over, one black and silver hand resting gently on Angela's own.

"It feels like wearing a constant layer," she said. "Like I've always got gloves on. It's the difference between this," and she ran a finger over the back of Angela's hand, down to her wrist, "and this." Her finger ran over Angela's sleeved arm about halfway to her elbow before she stopped and pulled her hand back. "It was hard to adjust to at first, like I was there but not really at the same time. Like I was constantly numb."

Angela slowly reached out, taking Fareeha's hand in both of her own. Though Fareeha hadn't sounded bothered in the least, something in her words upset Angela, and so she mimicked what Fareeha had done for her a moment ago, tracing the gleaming silver lines of the prosthetic with her fingertips. She tried to exert just a little extra pressure, to make the progress of her fingers up Fareeha's arm a little more noticeable. She ended it by running one finger across the seam that marked where the metal ended and skin began. *You are here.*

"Do you ever regret it?" Angela asked softly.

"Never. But sometimes I miss it."

"Like when?" She was expecting Fareeha to comment on how sensitive she now was to the cold,

something she never failed to mention when being sent out on a mission to Russia. She wasn't prepared for the husky whisper that was Fareeha's response.

"Like now."

Angela looked up into Fareeha's dark eyes, and her mouth went dry at the clear desire in them. She snatched her hands back, turning away and silently cursing herself. She and Fareeha had finally been settling back into a comfortable friendship, one where they could relax and joke like they had earlier. And now what had she done? "I'm sorry," she said, having to swallow to get enough moisture in her mouth to speak. "I'm sorry, Fareeha, I can't." She started to rise, but a hand wrapped around her wrist and tugged her back down.

"Don't run away again," Fareeha said with quiet desperation. "Please. Or do you really not want this?"

Angela nodded, then shook her head, unable to look in Fareeha's direction, unable to think, unable to breathe. Panic had wrapped itself around her chest and squeezed.

"Angela, listen to me. Neither of us have had it easy. I lost my mother, my dreams of joining Overwatch, my legs, countless friends. But I've always tried to fight for what I wanted, for what I thought was right. Even when my mother and I argued for days about my joining the military. Even when they thought I would never walk again. Even when I was asked to sacrifice my arms." She reached over, gentle fingers under Angela's chin turning her face towards her. "I don't want you doing anything you're not comfortable with or that you don't want to. And I know you think there's some obstacle here. But unless you tell me to stop, I can't walk away from this." She ducked her head to meet Angela's eyes. "You are worth fighting for."

Angela wished those words didn't make her heart rate skyrocket. She wished Fareeha didn't sound so sincere, or that her brown eyes didn't radiate concern.

She leaned forward, resting her forehead against Fareeha's shoulder, the soldier going still in surprise. "Don't stop," Angela said softly. "Be patient but... don't stop."

Fareeha's arms cautiously wrapped around her waist, and Angela wished they didn't make her feel so safe.

you, me, and the sky

They hadn't talked about it.

Angela had extracted herself from Fareeha's arms with a murmured excuse, and Fareeha had wordlessly released her. Angela had slipped out of the common room without even a goodbye, wondering at herself, worrying over what had just happened. No matter how she looked at it, from whatever angle she examined it from, she'd made the wrong decision. She should've told Fareeha to stop, should've put her foot down, should've set the boundaries that had always kept her safe.

It was the wrong decision. It was also the only one she could've made. That was what worried Angela the most: her apparent inability to say "no" to Fareeha.

Because I don't want to, her traitorous mind pointed out as she entered her room. Angela resolutely shoved the thought away. She had learned a long time ago that what she wanted was unimportant in the grand scheme of things, and very often did not coincide with what she needed. She usually wanted to get eight hours of sleep, or at least sleep in her own room. But when she tried, she would toss and turn until she was driven out of bed an hour later, sent running to her computers to chase the idea burning through her.

It wasn't that dissimilar to what Fareeha did to her, really. Wanting to say no, resolving to stay distant, and then crumbling at the first smile, chasing the small thrill that ran through her when she made Fareeha laugh.

But that would make Fareeha something she needed, and Angela was sure that couldn't be right.

—

They cut through the air easily, Angela reading the slight motion of Fareeha's shoulders and turning a second before Fareeha did so that they matched their lines perfectly. Amazing what a week and a half of training had accomplished. But Fareeha had been relentless once her Raptor suit had been repaired, getting up even earlier than Angela, pouncing on her the moment the doctor set foot outside her room.

But for all her hounding, once they got to the training field Fareeha was very attentive, making sure that they took breaks and ate meals. Angela decided that if Fareeha felt she had to take care of her, at least she was taking care of herself as well. And their time together was easy, discussing what they had done and what they could do, trading ideas equally and neither of them bringing up the incident in the common room. Even if she did catch Fareeha's eyes lingering on her several times.

Even when Fareeha caught her staring in return.

Fareeha's hand signaling her brought Angela back to the present, and she focused on the movements that they'd both mastered. "*High/low*," she signed, and without hesitation Angela soared upwards as Fareeha dropped her speed to come in underneath her. Not one of Angela's favorite maneuvers; it was intended as a defensive position, one where Fareeha would take fire in Angela's place. But no one was in danger right now. They were simply showing off for the three people watching them from below.

"Good," Jack said tersely in their ears while Lena bounced up and down and cheered as they blew past overhead. Even Winston smiled and waved.

Angela glided back down, level with Fareeha, seeing the small smile the soldier wore under her helmet. She knew it wasn't due to the praise of their audience. Just the sheer joy of flying for its own sake, a feeling that Angela more and more was coming to experience herself. She'd stopped complaining about Fareeha dragging her away from her coffee the third day in.

"Again?" she signed, and Fareeha grinned.

"Yes."

—

Even Fareeha hadn't been awake when the alarm blasted through the base, Athena's voice gravely informing them that she'd just received a distress call from Ilios. They'd rushed to the hangar, pulling their gear on even as Lena took the transport off the ground and set course for the Ilios watchpoint.

Their repeated attempts to contact the agents stationed there finally paid off when Mei's distressed face popped onto the screen. Her eyes were red and swollen, as if she'd been crying.

"What's—" Jack started, but Winston's hand came down hard on his shoulder, cutting him off.

"Mei," Winston said gently. "Can you tell us what happened?"

"They came out of nowhere," she said.

Jack opened his mouth, and then shut it again as Winston's hand gripped a little harder.

Winston pushed his glasses up, waiting.

"We had no idea," Mei continued. "We weren't ready. We fought as best we could, but..." She took a deep breath. "Everyone's hurt. Zenyatta is taking care of Genji, and McCree and I are doing all right. But Lucio's really hurt, and D.Va's still unconscious." She swallowed, eyes darting through the crowd and then back down. "Her mech got badly damaged, and we haven't been able to get her out yet."

In the deep silence of the transport, Angela pushed her way forward. "Mei, listen to me," she said, waiting for her old friend to meet her eyes. "We're already on our way; we'll be there as soon as we can. Now, tell me what's wrong and I'll let you know what to do until we arrive. There are things that you can do to help them now, and once I get there I can take over and let you have a break, okay?"

"O-okay." Mei nodded, straightening up a bit, her shoulders no longer hunched over. "Let me get something to write everything down."

As Mei turned off-screen, sounds of her rummaging through a drawer coming over the connection, Angela felt someone come up behind her. Familiarly cool fingers wrapped around her hand, squeezing lightly, but Fareeha said nothing before pacing restlessly over to one of the transport windows, leaning against the wall and staring outside.

And then Mei was back at the comms, and Angela braced herself for the bad news.

—

She woke with a start, looking out at the afternoon sun streaming in the window. She couldn't remember actually making her way to a room, much less going to sleep, but that wouldn't be the first time, nor would it probably be the last.

She could remember too well how Lucio looked laid out on a bed, his dark skin ashen and his leg broken in three places. She could remember, with sickening clarity, the dirt streaked across Fareeha's face and the sorrow in her eyes as she carried an unconscious and bloodied D.Va into the makeshift hospital, or the cry Jesse gave when he spotted them, trying to get up before Jack pushed him back down.

Angela pressed the heels of her palms into her eyes, as if it could banish the thoughts. Of course

she'd healed them, setting bones and knitting them back together, closing cuts and slashes, soothing burns until they were covered by new skin. But it couldn't erase the pain they'd suffered through, couldn't stop all the consequences. Lucio could dance today if he wanted (as if she would let him) but he'd feel those breaks when he was an old man, and that knowledge made her heart ache for him even more.

A knock at the door pulled her out of her thoughts, and she pushed the covers off just to see if she was dressed. She was, sort of, in the skintight flight suit she wore under the Valkyrie system. Good enough, and so she stumbled toward the door, wondering if she knew who her visitor was.

She did: Fareeha was the one waiting in the hall with her arms folded across her chest and dark smudges beneath her eyes. She didn't even glance at Angela's outfit. "Did you sleep?" "Yes." She must have, considering she woke up, but who knew for how long? "Good." Fareeha shifted, uncrossing her arms with a sigh, glancing past Angela and out the window of her room. She hesitated for so long that Angela was just about to prompt her to get on with it when she spoke in a rush. "Come fly with me."

Closing her eyes, Angela just barely resisted the urge to rub her forehead, feeling a headache coming on. She had no desire to argue with Fareeha right now. "I really have no interest in training right now."

"Not train, fly. Just you, me, and the sky."

"Fareeha--"

"Please."

She'd been bracing for a fight, for Fareeha to be stubborn and pushy, like the last time they'd had an argument at her door. Fareeha's quiet tone threw her, making her forget all her prepared objections. Angela looked at her again, reexamining the lines etched in her face and the stiffness of her body.

"I need to get away from this for a while," Fareeha continued in that same soft tone. "I thought you might like to as well. And I would... appreciate your company."

Angela's heart tightened in her chest. This was Fareeha, who threw herself into danger without hesitation, who pushed herself to the absolute limit and laughed about it later, who was the last to come for medical attention - if she came willingly at all. And this was Fareeha asking for help. There was no way she could turn her away. Not as a doctor, not as a fellow agent, not as a friend. "We can't go too far," she said, needing to be honest about what she could provide. "I should stay nearby in case anything changes."

Fareeha's eyes closed, her shoulders relaxing as she breathed out slowly. "We'll only go as far as you want," she agreed easily.

"Then let me suit up again and check in on the others, and I'll meet you at the back entrance." The one that faced the cliffs and the sea rather than the town.

"Got it." Fareeha stepped back, farther into the hall, almost turning to go. "Thanks."

Angela just smiled and closed the door on Fareeha's back.

After confirming that Hana and Lucio were still asleep and that Jesse hadn't re-aggravated any of his injuries, Angela let Mei and Winston know where she would be, she headed toward the back door. This was the hardest time for her; the time when she had to wait and trust the others to follow her instructions and actually take care of themselves. Yes, she had done everything that she could. She just wished she could do more.

She took a deep breath to help clear her mind as she spotted the shining blue Raptora suit in the doorway. There was at least one thing she could still do, one person she could still help. She came up alongside Fareeha, resting one hand on her elbow to announce her presence. "Ready?" she

asked.

Fareeha nodded, her face hidden by the visor. And then her hand moved, in one of the signs designed for Angela's exclusive use: *"I'm following you."*

Angela stilled as thoughts tumbled through her mind. Pure surprise at seeing Fareeha use that particular sign; relief that Fareeha was so willing to let Angela choose their course and keep them close to home; amused exasperation because *really* Fareeha was the one with the jets, how was Angela supposed to lead?

As soon as she thought it, she knew the answer. *"Up. Toward the water."*

Without hesitation, Fareeha launched into the sky, angling them toward the sea. But as soon as Angela was with her, Fareeha let off on the jets, drifting back, staying by Angela's side rather than racing off ahead as usual. They hovered for a few minutes, slowly gliding downwards as Angela just breathed in the sea air and listened to the waves crash against the rocks below. Switzerland was a place of mountains, and no matter how much she had traveled, the ocean always had a sort of draw for her. Her home was beautiful, but the ocean was fascinating.

They landed softly, allowing Fareeha's jets to recharge before Angela turned to her again. *"Higher. Faster."*

Fareeha nodded, but when they jumped into the air again, she quickly cut the jets, dropping below Angela. Ignoring Angela's attempts to ask just what was going on, she maneuvered underneath her, setting one broad shoulder plate directly underneath Angela's feet, slight pressure pressing up on her soles. She paused for just long enough for Angela's eyes to widen in recognition and for her to fold her wings protectively against her back.

Then Fareeha activated the jets to full blast.

Angela sucked in a breath as they rocketed through the air at a speed much greater than her wings could handle, her eyes squeezed shut, the wind pulling at her hair, the roar of the Raptora's engines drowning out any other sound. For just a second, right when the engines cut out, she felt weightless.

Unburdened.

Free.

She found that she was laughing, her wings spread to max to catch as much air as she could, to slow her descent as much as possible. The ocean laid out in front of her, as far as she could see, but her eyes searched out Fareeha's, trying to see through the visor. "A little warning would've been nice!" she shouted, not having the signs to say so.

Fareeha held up her hands in a shrug, but something in the curve of her neck and the tilt of her head told Angela she wasn't repentant in the least.

Well, two could play that game.

"Fuel?"

"Half."

"Good." Angela smiled sweetly at her, then added one more sign. *"Down."* And she folded her wings again and dived toward the water.

She thought she heard a curse from above her, but Angela was focused on what she was doing. She had no intention of actually hitting the water, which meant she had to judge her own speed and what her wings could handle along with Fareeha's remaining fuel reserves. But while one part of her mind was occupied with that, the rest of her was soaking in the sheer adrenaline thrill of

rushing through the air with abandon.

Sooner than she would like, she angled herself more forward, spreading her arms and legs to catch more air, spreading her wings out cautiously when she'd slowed some, feeling them tremble with the strain. Once she trusted them to hold, she pulled up more, shooting across the ocean only twenty feet from the water's surface, occasionally angling herself up enough to keep the height even as she dropped speed.

Right when she was starting to worry that she wouldn't have enough momentum left to make the rocks she'd been planning on landing on, arms wrapped around her waist and pulled her against a very familiar suit of armor. Angela relaxed into Fareeha's hold as the soldier flew them the rest of the way, landing and making sure of the footing before she let Angela down. But she didn't release her at first, not before leaning forward, putting her mouth by Angela's ear to be heard above the waves pounding the rocks they were on and spraying them with droplets of water. "A warning would've been nice," she said, and Angela laughed.

Fareeha glanced up, examining the cliff face they were beneath. "We'll have to do it in several jumps," she said, half-shouting. "I can't do it in one go."

Angela squeezed her arm to get her attention. "*I'm following you,*" she signed. I trust you, she meant.

"*Wait here,*" Fareeha told her, then engaged the jets to examine the cliff face more closely, beckoning to Angela once she found a spot she liked. As Angela jumped up to her, Fareeha grabbed her hand to guide her more easily onto the small ledge she'd found, their feet barely able to fit together on the rock.

They followed the same pattern for several more jumps, each time cramming together into some nook or on some ledge like mountain goats, holding onto each other just to have enough room. They were near the top when they finally found something with a bit more space, and as Fareeha's jets recharged Angela looked out over the ocean again. The sun was setting, sinking into the wine dark sea, painting the sky with color. She sighed, taking it all in, trying to remember when she last saw the sunset as anything more than the slowly dimming light coming through her office window.

"I needed this," She admitted quietly, now able to be heard over the waves, leaning in closer to Fareeha anyway.

"So did I," Fareeha responded, her own admission made easily, her voice relaxed, and Angela felt her heart lift as she realized how different she sounded than when she first came to Angela's door. "I'm glad you joined me."

She didn't know what to say, or how to say it. She smiled up at Fareeha and gave her the signal for the last jump to the top of the cliff.

When they landed, Fareeha pulled off her helmet and something in the motion sparked a thought - or a memory? - in Angela.

"Hey, Fareeha?" she asked casually. "I was wondering. How did I get to those quarters last night?"

Fareeha paused, watching Angela carefully, apparently not trusting her tone. "Don't ask questions you don't want the answer to," she said, but Angela was watching her closely, and saw how her eyes gave away the smile she was hiding.

After all, who else would think to carry her to bed? Who could? And who knew the Valkyrie suit well enough to take it off without Angela's assistance?

"It seems there's a lot I have to thank you for," Angela said, and, before she could talk herself out of it, raised herself up to press a quick kiss to Fareeha's cheek. When she pulled back, Fareeha was watching her with a soft smile, the corners of her eyes crinkled with amusement.

“My pleasure,” she said, and then wrapped an arm around Angela’s shoulder, pulling her gently into her chest plate, her fingertips stroking her hair.

“Fareeha?” She was surprised, not alarmed, by the sudden movement.

“Sorry,” she murmured. “It’s just that I promised myself that when I first kiss you we won’t be in these suits.”

Now that made Angela go still, even the rise and fall of her chest pausing as she held her breath, imagining Fareeha’s lips against her own, wondering if she’d taste like the sea right now.

Fareeha must’ve noticed her reaction, a soft huff of a laugh escaping her. “Does that disappoint you?”

She bit her lip, wondering how to respond. “Maybe a little.”

“Enough to make me change my mind?” Fareeha’s fingers stopped, sliding down to the back of her neck, her voice lowering into a tease as well.

“I won’t ask you to break your promise,” Angela told her, gently pulling back and smiling up at Fareeha as she let her go. “In fact, I’ll hold you to it.”

“You’ll break my heart if you start wearing that everywhere,” Fareeha said, gesturing to the Valkyrie suit.

Angela caught her hand and squeezed it. “We’ll see.”

—

She’d checked in on all of her patients again, and Angela was back in her quarters when she heard a familiar knock.

She opened the door, one eyebrow already raised at Fareeha, who glanced over the tank top and pajama shorts she was wearing.

“Just checking,” Fareeha grinned, leaning in and brushing a kiss across Angela’s forehead.

“*Out*,” Angela demanded, closing the door on Fareeha’s further laughter.

But she was smiling as she returned to her desk.

the calm

After she woke up and showered, Angela smiled to herself as she pulled on the Valkyrie's black flight suit first, before her pants and a loose t-shirt.

To be fair, she'd expected to find herself alone in the kitchen, but the smell of coffee met her just outside the doorway, and she inhaled gratefully as she entered. Jesse sat at the table, a mug cupped in his hands, and he nodded a greeting before sitting up straighter, gesturing to her.

"Expecting trouble?" he asked, concern evident in his drawn-together eyebrows.

"Of a sort," she answered with a shake of her head, letting a smile curve her lips as she poured a cup for herself. "You'll see." She turned to him, examining him professionally, noting the lines around his mouth. "How are you feeling?"

He leaned back in his chair with a sigh. "Ah, Angie, don't go all doctor on me first thing."

"And who did I have to haul out of bed after he slept through three alarms?"

"One time," he objected, but his eyes were far away, chuckling to himself as he recalled the memory.

"Once was enough," she said. "And since you're up early after being hurt..."

Laughing louder this time, he looked up at her with fondness. They'd been young together once, and they'd bonded over being the two new recruits. "You're relentless, you know that?"

"I know," she said easily, taking a seat opposite him. "Now talk."

He shrugged. "Just rolled onto my shoulder and woke up. Decided I shouldn't doze away the morning."

She frowned slightly, looking at his recently healed shoulder as if she could see past the clothes and to the wound. "It shouldn't be bothering you still."

"Couldn't really sleep anyway," he said quietly, his eyes steady on hers until she nodded and relented. She knew what that felt like.

They had a few moments to drink their coffee in companionable silence until Fareeha walked in, coming to a stop and barking a laugh as she saw Angela's attire. Angela, for her part, said nothing, hiding her smirk in her mug. Jesse looked back and forth between them, eyebrows coming together again.

"Fareeha likes to train first thing in the morning," Angela explained calmly once she had her expression under control. "I'm merely giving in to the inevitable."

Fareeha's grin broadened, and Jesse stared at her. "I appreciate your cooperation," she said, a layer to her words that Angela was determined not to flush at. Fareeha turned to leave, only pausing when Jesse called out to her.

"Ain't ya going to eat?" he asked.

Fareeha shook her head. "Already did. Angela's right, I was just coming to find her."

Angela gave a long suffering sigh, starting a laugh from Jesse and a quick smile from Fareeha before the soldier disappeared back down the hall.

The silence in the kitchen was a bit tenser in her departure, Angela trying to ignore the little looks Jesse was giving her.

"I like her," he said finally, tone almost too casual.

"Yeah," she answered, taking another sip of her coffee and hoping he would leave it there.

He looked at her for a moment longer, long enough that she thought he would drop it. Her mind wandered, replaying the look on Fareeha's face as she walked in.

"You're smiling," he said, interrupting her thoughts. "You've been doing that a lot recently." He jerked his head toward the door. "Since she joined up."

She didn't respond, just looking at him as she turned the mug around in her hands. Jesse was never really good at holding his tongue, especially not if there was a silence to fill.

"Guess I'm just glad to see it," he said finally. "You're always running around trying to do five things at once or falling asleep at your desk. I've told ya for years to take it a little easier."

"Someone has to keep you in line," she said, her smile at the familiar give and take fading as he leaned forward, his eyes unusually serious.

"Whatever - whoever - makes you happy, I'm for it."

Angela felt a lump form in her throat, and she swallowed. Was it really as simple as that? Was it allowed to be as simple as that? "You're just saying that so I'll leave you alone about your smoking," she said, forcing the smile.

"Cigars make *me* happy," he grumbled, leaning back, letting her breathe. His eyes found hers, and she was grateful for the simple affection she saw there.

"Thank you," she said quietly, surprising herself. Though she wasn't sure why, it felt important to let him know that she cared about him, that she valued his friendship.

He tugged his hat lower over his eyes, and even he didn't interrupt the silence as they finished their coffee.

—

When she heard the telltale roar of the engine at the bottom of the winding road that led to their base, Angela hurried from her office to the front door. She'd been looking into methods of field repair for the Raptora suit - or any way that they could avoid a repetition of the previous incident - and wanted to consult Fareeha about some of her ideas.

She came to a halt as the gleaming black motorcycle pulled up to the door and she noticed the riders.

Plural.

Fareeha, of course, was the one turning the engine off and sitting up as she pulled the key out of the ignition. Her passenger, only now straightening from where her arms had been wrapped around Fareeha's waist, her helmeted cheek pressed against Fareeha's back, was given away by the familiar straps and light blue glow around her chest. Lena swung her leg over the motorcycle and hopped down, pulling the helmet off of her always unruly hair. Following suit, Fareeha ran her fingers through her own helmet-mussed hair, and Lena said something that made them both laugh.

Angela bit the inside of her cheek, wondering if she should go back inside and find Fareeha later. But then Fareeha looked up, catching her eyes, her lingering smile returning full force. Though her attention remained on Lena, she shifted, her body turning toward Angela, gravitating in her direction.

Seeing that reassured Angela, though she still hung back, waiting politely in case she'd be intruding. And, if she were honest with herself, she was still wrestling with how to act around Fareeha when their teammates were around. So much of their time together was spent on their own, either on the practice field or during most of their language sessions at night. Angela wasn't sure if Jesse picked up on the change between them because they were that obvious or because he knew her that well.

The change between them. *Gott*. She flushed lightly, remembering the thrill when Fareeha had revealed that she'd been thinking about kissing her, that she was so determined and certain about it to make promises about the circumstances. It was still thrilling. It was still hard to look at Fareeha without remembering how rough her voice sounded at that moment. And Lena was much too perceptive, and had too good a nose for gossip, for Angela to chance something slipping.

But she could stand here, with the wind gently tugging on her hair and a cloudless blue sky above her, and watch them talk with the casual manner of old friends. She could catch Fareeha's eyes glancing at her, and return Lena's cheerful wave. She could smile as Lena bounded toward her, her hands full of shopping bags, and look behind toward Fareeha's more moderate approach, brown eyes intent on hers until Angela looked away to the smaller woman now standing next to her.

"Hey Angela!" Lena lifted the bags proudly, and Angela could glimpse boxes and jars inside. "I'm making dinner tonight!" And she blinked inside before Angela could do more than smile at her enthusiasm.

She turned back to Fareeha, feeling another thrill run through her when she found Fareeha's eyes still on her. The feeling that rose in her chest was as warm as the sun on her face. Happiness. Maybe it was that simple.

"Looks like you two had fun," she said, and Fareeha shrugged good-naturedly.

"Yeah. She's hard to turn down when she's that excited." She propped a hand on her hip and grinned at Angela. "You know, you should go for a ride with me sometime."

The words leapt from her before she could even consider them. "Why not now?"

She'd surprised her; she could see it in the way Fareeha straightened as if to distract from the way her eyes widened. "Somewhere you wanted to go?"

There's only a whisper of hesitation, of temptation to make something up, some errand or another.

"No," she said instead, and it was much easier to say than she thought. She thought it felt better: no hiding, no evasion. Just the honest desire to spend time together.

But Fareeha didn't respond at first, her eyes gone dark and contemplative as they swept over Angela's face, and that's when Angela started to worry.

"Is that okay?" she asked.

"More than okay," Fareeha answered, and there was that small curve of her lips, the mischief rising in her eyes. "Let's go then."

She turned and strode toward the motorcycle, and Angela hurried after her. "Wait, where are we going?"

Fareeha turned with a grin, holding out one of the helmets. "Thought you said you didn't care," she teased.

Angela took the helmet with a wordless murmur of protest, pulling it on and approaching the motorcycle more slowly. She'd never been on one before.

"All you have to do is hold on to me," Fareeha said, mounting the motorcycle and beckoning to Angela before putting on her own helmet.

Carefully, mimicking what she'd seen Lena do in reverse, Angela swung a leg over the seat, which was slightly curved and nestled her hips against Fareeha's. Her legs pressed along the outside of Fareeha's, her breasts into Fareeha's back, and her arms wrapped naturally around Fareeha's waist. She could feel Fareeha's muscles tense under her fingers, and her mind went blank.

She was grateful for the helmet that hid her blush and gave her an excuse not to talk, and for Fareeha's leather jacket that was enough of a barrier between them that Fareeha couldn't feel Angela's heart pounding in her chest. She hoped.

She thought it was perhaps a bit ridiculous to have this much of a reaction to their proximity, considering her age and experience, but it had been a long time since she'd been this close to anyone. And Fareeha was very different from the women that Angela had spent the rare night with, wanting nothing more than a few hours pleasant distraction.

Fortunately, that's when the engine came to life under her, driving out those thoughts as she

clutched a little harder at Fareeha as they turned and started down the road. Fareeha's fingers covered her own for a moment in reassurance, and then she picked up the speed. After a moment she was able to relax into the rhythm of it, laughing at the familiar twist of Fareeha's shoulders as they moved into a turn, basking in the odd familiarity of the noise of the engine in her ears and the wind pulling at her.

They rode for a little while, down the twisting roads, Angela alternating between looking around and pressing herself behind Fareeha with every new burst of acceleration. When Fareeha finally pulled over and parked, they were at one of the smaller beaches on the island, with only a few other people around.

Fareeha twisted in the seat. "Okay?" she said, voice muffled but audible through the helmet.

Angela pulled hers off, setting it down as she adjusted her ponytail. "Definitely," she said with a smile, catching a glimpse of Fareeha's answering grin as they dismounted, stowing the helmets.

"So which came first," Angela continued, "the motorcycle or the Raptora suit?"

"That obvious?" Fareeha laughed. "The Raptora. But I had so many doctors observing my every flight for the first six months that I couldn't really relax. This was a good substitute." She watched as Angela pulled off her shoes and socks and placed them next to the front wheel, following as she took her first step onto the sand.

"Chasing the thrill?" Angela teased.

Fareeha looked at her, one eyebrow raised skeptically. "Could you give it up so easily now?"

Giving up flying would mean no more time spent streaking across the sky with Fareeha. She didn't want to think about what could cause that to happen, and she shook her head. "No," she answered, more harshly than she intended.

But though Fareeha clearly noticed her tone, she said nothing, and they walked across the beach together, Angela sighing at the feeling of her feet sinking into the warm sand, the sound of the waves soothing her back to calmness.

"There go my plans of being virtuous and getting work done today," she murmured.

Fareeha chuckled. "Is that why you were waiting for us at the door? Virtue?"

"Hush," Angela scolded, lightly elbowing Fareeha in the side. "I've been looking into how to help more with the prosthetics on the battlefield. Something more elegant than just having a backup on hand and that wouldn't require the constant usage of the Caduceus staff."

Humming thoughtfully, Fareeha nodded. "And do you want to be virtuous or would you rather leave it for another time?"

Angela glanced over at her, taking in the quiet composure of her shoulders and the patience in her eyes. She'd accept Angela's decision, it seemed, even if that meant discussing medical theories and worse case scenarios. Not the usual conversation topic while at the beach, doubly so after Angela had suggested the ride in the first place. "Well, I was thinking about creating another setting, one that turned down the connections between you and the limb, just enough to still have full motion control but hopefully keep the pain at a more manageable level," she said, watching Fareeha's face closely. "Or I could try isolating the nerves that carry the pain signal and cut them out of the connection entirely. Those are the two solutions that would take the least time to implement and allow us more time to come up with something better."

And Fareeha hadn't lost any of her focus, hadn't sighed or looked away or tuned her out. Instead the look in her eyes was now one of contemplation. "I would prefer the first option," she said without hesitation. "I can handle pain, and I would rather not lose the warning that it can give. If someone managed to wing me, I would not want them to be able to line up a second shot without my ever knowing."

The quick and serious evaluation made Angela's chest tighten, not only because she didn't want to think of someone getting even one shot off against Fareeha. She reached out, catching Fareeha's hand in her own and squeezing. "Then that's enough virtue for today. Later I'll have you come by the office and we can experiment with that alternate setting."

Fareeha's smile was bright as her fingers laced through Angela's. "You make being a guinea pig actually sound inviting," she teased.

"Good," Angela said, a firmness to her tone that closed the matter.

"Speaking of which," Fareeha said, not letting go as she resumed their path across the sand, "here's a story I think you'll like--"

She told Angela of an incident from her first month with Helix, following it up with several more stories from Helix and the army, coaxing Angela to trade several stories from medical school and the hospital in return. They walked, Angela sometimes skimming her bare feet through the wet sand at the very edge of the waves while Fareeha watched with her hands stuck in the pockets of her jeans and promising that next time she'd wear more appropriate legs.

"When I'm not ambushed into a trip to the beach," she teased, her voice deep and throaty, making Angela laugh and blush and rejoin her.

They sat and talked some more, and when the end of one story had Angela blushing up to her ears, Fareeha chuckled and swept her jacket off, dumping it over Angela's head. The doctor sputtered indignantly, pulling it down and around her shoulders, losing track of her objections when she met Fareeha's flashing eyes.

"You look like you've had too much sun," she said with mock innocence. "I'm only trying to help."

Angela muttered something, trying to ignore the gentle warmth of the jacket and the way it smelled like Fareeha. Then she glanced at her watch and sighed. "We shouldn't miss dinner," she said.

"We shouldn't," Fareeha agreed, but made no effort to move. Her eyes swept over Angela. "That looks good on you."

Angela stood, pulling the jacket on properly and laughing at how the sleeves fell partway down her hands. She smiled down at Fareeha. "It's too big for me," she said with a shrug, but Fareeha's eyes had darkened, their gaze unwavering.

"That's part of why I like it," she said quietly, and Angela flushed and looked away. How in the world Fareeha could make her pulse quicken with such little effort was beyond her-

With the soft crunch of sand underfoot announcing her movement, Fareeha soon stood, fingers gently guiding Angela's face back towards hers. "You can't have any idea what you do to me."

"I think I have some idea," Angela murmured, meeting Fareeha's eyes for a second before closing hers as fingers trailed up her jawline and across her cheek. "Considering..."

"What?" Fareeha prompted her gently, now playing with the ends of her hair, twisting a lock of blonde idly around one finger.

"How I feel." Angela breathed the words, focused more on the gentleness of Fareeha's touch, of the smell of the jacket, of the soft flick of her hair against her neck. When Fareeha didn't move or respond, she opened her eyes and found Fareeha looking at her. Belatedly she realized that Fareeha was silently asking for permission, each slow touch a question.

And she was never someone who could leave a question unanswered.

She grabbed Fareeha's shirt, gently pulling her down until their lips met in a soft, careful kiss. Right up until she heard Fareeha draw in a deep breath, and then there was an arm tight around her waist, pulling her against Fareeha's body with the same urgency that had her hand gripping the back of Fareeha's neck, not allowing her to break away until Angela would let her.

After a moment they both pulled back, breathing hard.

"Dinner," Fareeha said reluctantly, a tremor to her voice that pleased Angela and made her brush her thumb across Fareeha's lips.

"Yeah." She gently took a step back, out of the embrace, and shrugged the jacket off, holding it out to Fareeha. "This is yours." They both needed to recover from that sudden surge of intensity,

and Fareeha smiled gratefully at her as she pulled the jacket on.

After they returned to the motorcycle and Angela put her shoes back on, they climbed on and Fareeha started them back up the winding roads, back to the base and the normal routine. Angela held onto Fareeha's waist a little closer than really necessary, keeping herself pressed against her back.

Warmth swelled in her chest, and she smiled to herself. Happiness. She could get used to this.

the storm

Chapter Notes

Please correct my French if it's wrong, it's been approximately 10 million years since I studied the language.

The mission had gone to hell almost immediately.

Pharah swore under her breath as her head swung left and right, scanning the streets. Mercy knew she was watching the indicators from her visor, trying not to focus on the west end of the city, where all the smoke and shouting and gunshots were. Rather, the two of them were assigned to the east side, the side that Talon was heading for with their trucks and their weapons. The side that was still filled with civilians.

“Consider this your first assignment,” Soldier 76 had called as they poured out of the transport, pointing them emphatically away from the fight. “Clear them out and keep them safe!”

They’ve gotten most of the people on the main roads out already, more people from the surrounding streets following after them without being prompted. Mercy supposed they looked the part: her face and Valkyrie suit were well known still even from years ago, and Pharah’s bright blue and gold Raptora was too heroic looking to be intimidating, especially in her company. They’d been peppered with questions in French, Mercy answering fluidly, Pharah more haltingly but clearly. That had been a pleasant surprise, and Mercy was just starting to believe that they had gotten the worst under control.

An explosion to the north made them pivot as one, staring in horror at the cloud of smoke billowing over the city. Together they leapt into the air, Pharah signaling a *high/low* command as they approached the street containing the main Talon forces.

They were passing overhead when the building on the corner across from them exploded, the shockwave knocking them back. Mercy gasped as a sharp line of pain bloomed across her cheek, Pharah shouting as she struggled to keep them stable in the air. Even through the ringing in her ears, Mercy could hear the groan of overstressed metal and the crash of falling concrete.

She saw the person huddled against the crumbling wall, and suddenly the civilian was Reyes, trying to duck into cover in Switzerland. She saw them fling their arms above their head to shield themselves from falling debris. She heard screaming, some of it nearby, some of it years old and hundreds of miles away. Mercy turned to Pharah, only to find her visor already staring back at her.

“Don’t follow!” Pharah shouted, and dove before Mercy could come back to herself enough to comprehend the meaning of the words. The Valkyrie wings shivered in the sky without the support of the Raptora jets, and Mercy’s hands went numb as blue and gold flashed in the sunlight, strong and gleaming through the dust that filled the air. When she choked on her next breath, as she was coughing and gasping, time slammed back into her at full force and she cried out, diving after Pharah. Too slow to catch up, her eyes locked on Pharah as the wall came down.

She landed by the rubble, even the bright colors of the Raptora hidden underneath chunks of cement and rebar, the Caduceus staff needing at least line of sight in order to work.

Too late, again.

She no sooner thought it than anger surged through her. No. Not again. *Never* again. She's worked in war zones and refugee camps; she's learned so much, practiced too much. She began digging through the side of the rubble, knowing from more than one rescue effort how to keep an air pocket from collapsing. She opened a private channel, words as urgent as her hands. "Pharah, respond. Can you hear me?"

Hands joined hers, and Mercy glanced over at an unfamiliar man kneeling next to her, pulling cement away as fast as he could. "*Va!*" she ordered him, but he shook his head grimly and she didn't have time to argue. "Pharah," she tried again, but the next voice over the communicator was Soldier's.

"Anyone have eyes on Mercy and Pharah?" he asked, and she switched her voice to the main channel. She couldn't have the others talking over Pharah if - when - she responded.

"Quiet!" she snapped, getting a tense silence in response. She could just see Soldier's jaw tightening the way it always did when he wanted to argue, but he knew better.

"Here," she heard over the private channel, Pharah's voice hoarse and thick with pain but *there*. "We're okay."

Mercy switched channels immediately, nearly choking on the words in her rush of relief. "There could be injuries that you can't feel right now, don't move until I see you."

A whispered, raspy laugh that nonetheless threaded its way to Mercy's heart and squeezed. "No chance of that."

"Pharah's trapped in debris," Mercy announced to the team. "I'm getting her out now. Call me for emergencies only."

"I am on my way," Zarya said. "I will watch your back while you retrieve our little bird."

Pharah huffed her annoyance at the term over the team channel, and Mercy could sense the others' tension easing.

She and the man next to her kept digging, listening to the sound of fighting moving farther east, away from their position. At the first glimpse of dented blue metal, Mercy paused, fumbling for her staff with hands shaking from worry or fatigue, even she wasn't sure. Golden light poured through the rubble, and the Raptora suit shifted, quickly stilling when a few concrete chunks settled more deeply around Pharah.

"Thanks," she said over the private channel, her voice sounding stronger.

"Will you be alright to fly when we get you out of there?"

The hesitation was all the answer she really needed. "No. Pretty sure my legs are gone."

Mercy bit back her reaction, a strained sound all that escaped her. Gesturing to the familiar heavy footsteps behind her, she called out, "Zarya, we'll need your assistance."

"My turn," Zarya answered, gently pulling Mercy out of the way and throwing the rubble around like it was made of styrofoam. Even the civilian stood back after a moment, watching her in awe; Mercy took the opportunity to heal where his palms and fingers were torn and bleeding from his efforts. She turned the staff on the woman that Pharah had rescued as soon as Zarya revealed her, and the man pushed forward, picking her up and embracing her the second he could.

"*Merçi beaucoup*," he said, repeating it in several variations as he looked between the three members of Overwatch.

Zarya nodded to him with a smile.

Mercy held his eyes just long enough to respond, "*Avec plaisir*," before turning her attention back to Pharah, who pushed herself upright, causing Mercy's breath to catch in her throat as she saw the twisted, broken ends of the Raptora suit right below Pharah's previous amputations.

Everything below that was gone. Blood covered the broken metal, and Mercy knew that Pharah hadn't gone as unscathed as she was trying to show.

“Je vous en prie,” Pharah managed, waiting until the civilians had left to pull her cracked helmet off, shaking her sweat soaked hair out of her eyes as she looked at her teammates. “Mercy-”

“Not now,” Mercy cut her off ruthlessly. She’d thought for a second that she’d lost Pharah; she’d been too busy making sure that didn’t happen to be much more than relieved when she’d heard her voice again. Now, seeing just how close of a call it’d been to a serious injury - how anyone else would’ve been maimed in the same circumstances - made fear and anger batter against her defenses. She was shaking, torn between the two emotions, but she was Doctor Angela Ziegler, and she still had work to do. She couldn’t be distracted. She couldn’t fall apart.

Turning away, she glanced at Zarya. “Would you take her back to the transport? The mission’s over for her.” She stalked away, heading toward the fighting, where she could lose herself in the constant adrenaline rush that was trying to keep her teammates and the innocent alive. Where a split second decision could save or doom someone, and she had no room for hesitation. No time to second guess. No chance to scream over what she might have lost.

“You carried her all the way here?” Tracer’s voice drifted through the open transport doors as Mercy stepped onto the ramp. “What I would’ve given to see that!”

“It was nothing,” Zarya laughed. “I told her relax, pretend you are blushing bride.”

“Pharah, you let her-?”

“What was I supposed to do, let myself be carried over her shoulder like a sack of potatoes?” Pharah retorted. “And for your sake, Aleks, I hope your bride isn’t wearing armor on your wedding day.”

Mercy entered the transport, the last to do so, looking over at the trio just as Zarya smiled softly. “I do not believe that will be a problem,” she said, then waved to Mercy. “I brought her,” she said proudly, gesturing to where Pharah was sitting, her shoulders straightening as Mercy looked to her, barely glancing at her legs.

“We retrieved everything of your suit we could,” she told Pharah, watching her eyes grow worried at the even tone. “That should make it easier to replace.” She had to exert herself not to grind her teeth over the word.

“Thanks,” Pharah said, as if that was enough to satisfy her, but her hand came up and signed, *“Are you okay?”*

And anger flooded Mercy once more. How dare she. How *dare* she throw herself into such danger right in front of Mercy and then ask that so easily, and in that fashion? In their language? *“Stop,”* she signed in return, the word one harsh slash of her hand downward, and she turned away from the pain in Pharah’s eyes that had nothing to do with her injuries. She couldn’t do this. Not now.

She walked away again, hating how relieved she was that Pharah couldn’t follow her.

“All patched up, Aleks,” Angela said, stepping back from the exam table. “But let me know if your wrist starts bothering you. And...” she took a breath, surprised at how she still had to steady herself before continuing. “Thank you for your help earlier.”

Aleksandra smiled, one large hand finding Angela’s shoulder and squeezing it. “I am always pleased to assist you,” she said, then crouched down to bring her face more level with Angela’s. “Be gentle with her,” she added more quietly. “It is not an easy thing that happened today for her either.” She patted Angela’s shoulder with almost enough force to stagger her before ambling towards the door. “And she adores you,” she said, almost as an afterthought. “She will not sleep easily tonight, knowing you are upset.”

"I-" Angela started, but Aleksandra just held up a hand.

"There is no need to explain. Only think of what I have said." And she walked out of the med bay, closing the door behind her.

Angela slowly cleaned up empty packaging, tucking things away in their proper place, letting the routine guide her as she waited for the door to open again, knowing it wouldn't. She'd seen everyone who'd been on the mission today except for Fareeha, and even if the soldier actually bothered to check in after being in the field, there was no reason for her to come today. Not after Angela had turned away from her twice already.

She turned off the main lights in the med bay, leaving on the dim emergency lights in case someone needed anything in the middle of the night. As she headed for her room, she paused outside of Fareeha's, noticing the light filtering into the hall from underneath the door. She hesitated, then stepped up to the door, raising her knuckles to the wood. Avoiding this wouldn't help either of them.

After knocking, she barely waited for Fareeha's "Come in," before slipping inside, closing the door behind her. Fareeha was sitting on the edge of her bed in boxers and a t-shirt, relinquishing her grip on the wheelchair that waited nearby. "It's unlocked," Fareeha finished slowly, her dark eyes giving away nothing; Angela wondered if her presence was even welcome.

"How are you?" she asked, falling back onto her profession as the safest course of action, feeling unusually tongue-tied.

Fareeha glanced away from her. "My legs hurt."

"Let me-" Angela stepped forward, pausing when Fareeha shook her head and gestured to the empty space between her amputations and the floor.

"My legs," she said again, a strange, bitter smile twisting her lips. "That hasn't happened in a while," she murmured, quiet enough that Angela wasn't sure she was supposed to hear.

Hesitating, Angela felt the usual treatments rise to her lips and had to bite them back. As if Fareeha didn't know them all already.

Silence fell heavily between them as Angela found herself struggling yet again that day. It was when Fareeha finally sighed, obviously about to make some excuse or another that Angela's control finally snapped.

"Don't follow"? What were you thinking?" she asked, watching how Fareeha's eyes snapped to her in surprise. At the question, or maybe at the raw anguish that Angela could hear in her own voice. And that was the start of it, more than the wall collapsing, more than the panic of not knowing if Fareeha was okay: that moment in the sky when Fareeha left her behind.

"I needed you to keep the skies clear for our return," Fareeha answered, mouth twisting again.

"Obviously I thought I'd be fast enough." But then her eyes cleared, returning to Angela's with a challenge of her own. "And we couldn't both get buried."

"Of course not! But then tell me that. Are we partners or not?" Angela felt her hands curl into fists at her side. "If we're working together I need you to trust me."

"I do," Fareeha told her softly, her own hands moving to massage one of her thighs. "From the second I got hit I knew you'd get us both out alive."

It was the certainty in her voice that froze Angela, that made her imagine what it had been like underneath the rubble. "A few inches higher and you would've bled out before we got to you," she whispered, finally acknowledging the fear that had wedged itself in her chest since she first saw Fareeha's injuries.

"You would've brought me back," Fareeha said instantly, and the last of Angela's defenses crumbled.

"And you think that makes it okay?" Angela demanded, so fiercely that Fareeha drew back from the assault. "You think everything would be fine because you'd be alive and that forgives

everything? Whatever happened to you not being expendable? Your limbs are replaceable; you are not!" Her heart was pounding, her ears roaring, and everything was focused on Fareeha's startled brown eyes. "Even if I brought you back, you still would've *died*. And I'm the one who'd have to know what you look like when your eyes are staring at nothing." She choked on a sob, and Fareeha grabbed for the arm of her wheelchair, trying to wrestle it closer despite the locked wheels. "I'm the one who'd have to live the rest of my life knowing what that looked like."

"No- I'm sorry- that's not what I meant," Fareeha said, her eyes fast on Angela before she had to look away, growling and shoving the wheelchair back, rocking it dangerously close to tipping. It was the first time Angela had seen Fareeha display any sort of frustration or temper with the chair, and she stepped forward even as Fareeha held a hand out to her. "Damn it, Angela, come here."

Without hesitation, Angela closed the distance between them, willingly letting Fareeha pull her into her arms and onto her lap, wrapping her arms around Fareeha in return and hiding her face against her shoulder. She felt better the instant she could smell fuel and soap, could feel the rise and fall of Fareeha's chest, the slow circles of Fareeha's hand on her back. She felt calmer, safer, and the knowledge of how quickly she could lose this made it as terrifying as it was comforting.

"You scare me," she admitted quietly.

Fareeha's breath hitched, her fingers pausing for a second before returning to their steady rhythm.

"I don't mean to."

"I thought I was going to lose you."

"You didn't. I'm right here."

She didn't fight the words that came naturally to her. "I need you here."

Fareeha didn't reply, not with words. She shifted slightly, settling Angela a bit closer against her, turning her head and pressing a kiss to Angela's temple. Creating more contact between them, proving her presence.

"I didn't want to worry about anyone like this," Angela confessed, her eyes squeezed shut. "I didn't want to hurt like this."

"Angela, *habibti*," Fareeha murmured the words into her ear. "I promise--"

"Don't." Angela pulled back in order to meet Fareeha's eyes. "Don't make any promises you can't keep. I knew from the start that you were brave, and honest, and a protector." She brushed her thumb over the tattoo under Fareeha's eyes. "I admire those things; I don't want them to change." She took a deep breath, steadying herself. "I may worry about you, but I know what I'm getting into."

Fareeha smiled that half-smile that made her a shiver run through her. "Do you?"

"I'm willing to find out," she said, resting her hands on Fareeha's shoulders and leaning forward to press their foreheads together. She had to at least try, didn't she? Even if it scared her. Even if it hurt. Fareeha had told her that she was worth fighting for.

Wasn't Fareeha?

Angela Ziegler had never been a coward. She couldn't start now.

"Can I stay here tonight?"

"Of course," Fareeha answered immediately, then chuckled. "Just take the lab coat off before bed, okay?"

"Only if you let me look at your legs in the morning."

Fareeha pulled back, grinning, to tuck some stray hair behind Angela's ear. "This is part of what I'm getting into?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I look forward to it." She looked away, her jaw working, and Angela had a second of worry before realizing that she was trying to hide a yawn. "Sorry," Fareeha said when she realized

she'd been caught. "I took painkillers a little while ago, and they always put me to sleep." "Never apologize for taking care of yourself," Angela told her, kissing the corner of her mouth until Fareeha turned her head and captured her lips more fully. They kissed slowly and gently, without impatience, without teasing, without words. Angela's hands slipped under Fareeha's shirt, loving the warmth of her skin and the tenseness of the muscles under her fingers. She could feel Fareeha's hands on her thighs, holding her close and steady.

Reluctantly, very reluctantly, she pulled away, sliding off of Fareeha's lap before finally standing by the bed. Fareeha only watched her with a pleased smile and quiet eyes. "If you want to borrow a shirt, they're in the second drawer," she said easily, and Angela nodded.

Even with her back turned to the bed, she could feel those eyes on her as she stripped down to her underwear, laying her clothes over the back of a chair and pulling on the first shirt she found in the drawer. She turned, shaking her head as she saw Fareeha start to shift to the inside of the bed.

"Stay there. I don't want you having to climb over me if you need to get up."

"I wouldn't mind," Fareeha said, but her voice was drowsy, and Angela just sighed at her as she got into bed from the foot of it, not wanting to give Fareeha the satisfaction.

Knowing exactly what she was doing, Fareeha chuckled and switched off the light. Angela felt an arm fall over her waist, Fareeha's hips nestling against her own and her breasts against her back.

"Good night," she murmured, breath tickling the back of Angela's neck.

Angela relaxed into the bed, listening to Fareeha's breathing deepen and even out, trying to remember when she last fell asleep next to someone. It'd been a long time, if she discounted the quick naps on transports that happened on several long flights home. *Maybe that will change.* She fell asleep with that pleasant thought still on her mind.

—

She woke in confusion with the sun in her face - after all, her room faced west- *Oh.* Right. She carefully turned in Fareeha's arms, leveraging herself up onto one elbow to look at where her companion was sleeping.

It hit her then, looking at how the lines around Fareeha's mouth had eased with a sudden swell of fondness that took her by surprise. Even after yesterday, after the reminder that disaster could strike at any time, Fareeha made her feel secure in a way she hadn't felt since before the Omnic crisis. Like just this much was certain: no matter what happened, tomorrow would always come, and Fareeha would be there with her.

This is someone I could build a future with.

It should've scared her. It didn't.

gravity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Angela remained in bed for a few moments, watching the peaceful rise and fall of Fareeha's chest, absorbing the rare quiet moment while she could. When she shifted, beginning to slide out from Fareeha's arms, the soldier stirred as Angela guessed she would.

"Angela?" Her voice was thick with sleep, and her brown eyes squinted into the sun as she looked up at her. Then Fareeha hummed softly, letting her eyes fall closed against the light and settling back into the pillow. "You're gorgeous."

Angela breathed a laugh. She'd heard that line many times before, but there was something about the spontaneity in Fareeha's voice - like it had slipped out before she could really think about it - that made it seem charming rather than calculated. "You're easy to please."

"Only because I just woke up next to the most beautiful, determined, intelligent woman I know," Fareeha responded.

"If you keep that up, I'm going to think you're trying to get me into bed," Angela teased, running her fingers through Fareeha's hair, her breath stopping short as Fareeha opened her eyes to give her a slow, languid smile.

"I think I already have."

"Hush," Angela scolded, gently pinching Fareeha's ear. "Before I look at your legs, I'm going to get coffee. Do you want some?"

Fareeha pushed herself up, propping her back against the wall with a grin. "Sure."

Angela stretched as she stood, casting her mind back to other shared mornings. "Black?" she ventured, fairly confident in her answer.

"Black," Fareeha confirmed, sounding pleased.

Pulling her lab coat on to give herself at least a pretense that she wasn't wandering around in sleepwear, Angela nodded. "Be right back then. Don't lock the door." As she stepped out into the hall, she could hear Fareeha's laughter.

She walked down the hallway toward the kitchen, absorbing the quiet, still wrapped up in the pleasure of waking up with Fareeha. It's only when the smell of coffee hit her in the doorway that she reawakened to the world.

And since when was Overwatch full of early risers? she wondered, curious to see who was already there.

The two tired faces slumped at the table made her smile, though she tried to hide her amusement as she passed Hana and Lucio. "Up already?" she asked, figuring she knew the answer.

"Haven't gone to bed yet," Lucio said, smiling and yawning as Hana grumbled into her mug.

"We promised we'd stream until we beat this raid, but we keep wiping. We're taking a break and then regrouping."

Opening the cabinet and pulling down two mugs, Angela shook her head over them. "So you're pulling another all-nighter? Didn't you promise to cut down on those for me?"

"Hey now, only one person here is planning on double fisting their coffee and it's not us," Lucio objected, and Hana peered blearily over at her.

"...Does Fareeha know you're taking her mug?" she asked.

Silence fell over the room as everyone looked at the two mugs sitting innocently on the counter. Sure, she'd automatically gotten out Fareeha's Helix Security mug as well as her own red and white mug, but what did that matter?

Apparently a lot, as Lucio suddenly howled with laughter, slamming a hand onto the table in front

of Hana with his palm up. "Pay up!"

"What?!" Hana sat up straight, looking wide awake now. "No way, that doesn't mean anything!"

"Yeah right," Lucio scoffed, still chuckling. "Coffee for two this early in the morning? Please. And-!" He leaned over in one smooth motion, going horizontal on the chair to peek under the table at Angela before rising just as easily. "No pants."

So much for modesty; Angela folded her arms across her chest as Hana looked at the bare legs beneath the lab coat.

"Fuck," Hana conceded, slumping in her chair.

"Language," Angela reprimanded her, looking between the two, her quietly pleasant morning lost under a surge of annoyance at whatever she was clearly missing. "Now," she continued, and the two young members of Overwatch straightened in their chairs at her tone. "What exactly is going on here?"

The two shared a look, and she can see in Lucio's wry smile and Hana's little shrug that they're more repentant over being caught than anything else.

"We've had a bet going-" Lucio started, but Angela interrupted.

"Just you and Hana?"

He shook his head, fingers drumming the table. "Me, Hana, Jesse, Mei, Aleksandra..."

"Reinhardt, Genji, Lena, and Zenyatta. A few others." Hana added, ticking the names off on her fingers.

"About, you know," Lucio gestured at Angela - or maybe at the mugs still sitting behind her - and at her blank expression elaborated. "You and Fareeha."

"*Verdami*," Angela muttered, feeling a slow sinking in her stomach.

"Well have you *seen* the way she looks at you?" Hana insisted. "Talk about not being subtle at all." She looked at Lucio and shook her head. "I really should've taken an earlier week."

"If you'd listened to Lena-"

Angela held up a hand to cut Lucio off, not wanting to hear just how deep the rabbit hole went.

"Does no one remember that fraternization is frowned upon?"

Both of them looked at her, then succumbed to laughter. "Since when?" Hana asked.

"They can't make a rule about it, else half the team would be gone," Lucio added.

They both had a point. There had been stricter views in the previous Overwatch, but honestly nowadays they were too often struggling just to stay on top of everything to worry about what their agents were doing. As long as it didn't affect one's performance in the field, everyone politely ignored it. Or, they were supposed to.

"So you bet about...what, exactly?"

"When you two would start dating."

Angela took a breath, willing herself to calm down. She turned to the counter and poured coffee into her mug, adding a spoonful of sugar and, upon consideration of the last five minutes of her life, one more. She stirred the coffee, the familiar routine, the smell, the warmth of the mug in her hand, the quiet chimes of the spoon occasionally tapping against the mug - they slowed her racing thoughts, allowing her to get a better handle on them. Okay, so apparently everyone had been taking an interest in her and Fareeha's relationship. Given how many people were involved in this betting pool and how casually Lucio and Hana were treating it, no one had a problem with it, or surely someone would've spoken to her before this.

And in a way that was comforting. To know that her friends cared about it, even if most of them probably saw the bet as just another way to pass the time. She turned back to where Lucio and Hana were watching her anxiously.

"So..." Hana said, as Angela sipped her coffee, wincing at the scalding temperature.

"So are you two dating?" Lucio finished for her, leaning forward in his seat.

Angela lowered the mug, contemplating the two hopeful faces in front of her. And she smiled.

“Who wins if I say yes?”

Lucio’s hand shot into the air. “I do!”

“Nope,” Hana shut him down. “It’s Sunday. Your week expired at midnight.”

“What?” Lucio pulled out his phone and checked the date and time. “Aw man, you’re right. So who is it?”

Hana was already scrolling through a list on her phone, eyes flicking through the lines with ease. And then she stopped, her thumb hovering over some text that Angela couldn’t read from this distance, and crumpled into laughter.

“What?” Lucio and Angela demanded together, and Lucio stood up to reach over and snatched Hana’s phone out of her hand. He scanned the screen, then fell back into his chair with a groan.

“That just ain’t right,” he complained.

“Who is it?” Angela repeated. And when Lucio covered his eyes with a hand rather than explain, Hana was the one who forced the name out between her giggles.

“Fareeha!”

Angela bit her lip, trying to fight back a smile at the confidence - almost arrogance - of one Fareeha Amari. “Then yes,” she said. “We’re dating.”

“So wrong,” Lucio moaned, sending Hana into another fit.

She carefully balanced both mugs as she opened the door to Fareeha’s room, slipping inside and closing it behind her with one foot while concentrating on not spilling coffee everywhere.

“That took a while,” Fareeha said from the bathroom door, and Angela glanced over to where Fareeha sat in her wheelchair, toweling her hair dry. “Did the coffee machine fight back?”

“I ran into Hana and Lucio,” Angela explained, placing the mugs down on Fareeha’s nightstand.

“Those two?” Fareeha glanced at the clock and shook her head. “When do *they* sleep?”

“Never, apparently.” Angela, her hands now free, beckoned Fareeha forward as she sat on the edge of the bed. She was planning on enjoying this.

When Fareeha pulled up beside her, Angela carefully leaned forward, running her hands over Fareeha’s thighs, indulging herself with Fareeha’s muscles for just a second before focusing her attention on the lightly swollen amputation points. She noticed Fareeha’s grin before she ducked her head back down; apparently she had no problem with Angela’s lapse in professionalism.

“Do they still hurt?” she asked, fingers tracing the new (thankfully) small scars from the previous day, marking where the shattered suit had cut into her skin.

“A little,” Fareeha answered. “Though it’s more soreness than pain.”

Angela nodded. Soreness was expected; pain would’ve been a problem. “Use the chair for the rest of the day,” she said. “Give the swelling a chance to go down before stressing it with the prosthetics.” Lightly, exerting almost no pressure at all, she started to massage the swollen area of one leg, keeping one eye on Fareeha’s face to gauge her reactions. As she moved back up, onto the thigh, she increased the pressure, working on loosening the scar tissue and the muscles. “By the way,” she said casually, as her fingers mercilessly worked on a knot that had Fareeha clenching her jaw, “I told Hana and Lucio that we’re dating.”

“You what?” Fareeha’s voice was strangled with surprise, her clenched jaw not helping matters at all.

Angela tsked at her. “You shouldn’t tense up like that,” she said, before pausing and laying her hands flat on Fareeha’s thighs. “You’re welcome, by the way.” She leaned forward, pressing a kiss to Fareeha’s cheek. “You owe me dinner with part of your winnings.”

When she pulled back, Fareeha’s face was a study in contrasts: surprise and delight, mischief and embarrassment - they all ran across her face until her lips settled into a smirk despite the flush in

her cheeks. “Don’t I get a say in this?” she said, her voice brimming with laughter.

“Not anymore,” Angela answered. “Since those two know, everyone knows.”

“Then it sounds like I owe you a date as well as dinner,” Fareeha said, and Angela found herself smiling.

“I fully intend to collect on both of those,” she said, turning her attention back to Fareeha’s legs and the interrupted massage. “And they have to be separate. Just dinner will not count as a date.”

“Yes ma’am!” Fareeha saluted her before wincing as her fingers found yet another knot.

Once Angela finished, they drank their coffee - now at a more mouth-friendly temperature - and parted for the day. Fareeha to the hangar to work on the replacement Raptora legs, Angela to her office to update and organize the records from yesterday.

“So everyone will leave you alone and come bombard me with questions,” Fareeha muttered as Angela gathered her things, and Angela smiled.

“They have to come see you to pay off the bet anyway,” she said, overly sweet, and Fareeha hid her laughter. “Have a good day, *schätzli*.”

Because really, there was no way Fareeha was getting away with it that easily.

—

Angela was just about finished with the records when her phone buzzed, and she pulled it from her pocket to find a text from Jack:

Angela, Fareeha, please meet me in the briefing room in five minutes.

She put the phone away slowly, her mind racing. He used their names rather than their call signs, but asked to meet in the briefing room. That made it hard to tell if this was supposed to be some official and on the record type of meeting or not.

Filing away the folder she had in hand, Angela tried to push the worries from her mind as she exited her office and headed for the briefing room. She’d know soon enough what this was about.

She stopped in the hallway when she saw Fareeha coming from the opposite direction, Hana next to her. Angela waved at the pair when they spotted her, and Fareeha smiled back as Hana pretended to gag.

“I’m out,” she announced, stopping short of where Angela was. “I’ll see you two later. Don’t stay out too late!”

“Ready?” Fareeha asked Angela, who nodded in return.

“For anything.” Whatever it was Jack wanted, they could get through it.

Angela opened the door, but Fareeha went through first with the air of a bodyguard willing to take the first bullet.

Jack stood behind the table, the visor giving away nothing as he looked between them, even when Angela rested a hand on Fareeha’s shoulder.

“Pack your bags,” he told them. “I have a mission for you.”

Verdami - Damn me

Thank you for your patience! The next chapter should be the last one!

love is like falling

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Angela had been thinking a lot about boundaries recently.

Truthfully, she'd been thinking about them since Fareeha first showed up in her doorway, at once both a reminder of her mother and entirely herself.

She'd been thinking of them since Fareeha started flirting with her, since the first time she got hurt on a mission, forcing Angela to try and draw a line between what a teammate should do, what a doctor should do, what a friend should do.

She'd been thinking about it since that too-easy admission to Hana and Lucio, and the eager way they'd embraced it, as if there was no line to be crossed at all.

She's always had a - call it odd - relationship with those boundary lines. She had blasted her way through her schooling at such an accelerated rate that there were those who argued she shouldn't be allowed to graduate or receive her license no matter how many tests she passed or articles she published. She'd often chosen schools or hospitals simply based on the fact that they would accept her.

She'd ended up at Overwatch partially because they were willing to give someone so young her own lab to run and almost all the funding that she'd asked for.

In response, she'd carefully lived within a strict code of ethics, inside of the rules and guidelines for dosages and treatments. Her nanites had changed everything, but they'd been controlled, regulated, tested. They only did what other doctors and time could manage.

At least, up until the point that she blurred the line between life and death, that last, supposedly invincible, boundary.

Now she was thinking about it again, standing on the second floor landing of a small house that Overwatch had hastily bought, their assignment given in two short sentences:

Talon's stockpiling weapons here. Find the stash and take it out.

They'd gotten a house for the space and the privacy, setting up the Valkyrie and Raptora suits in the master bedroom along with the holoscreen communicator. (Angela was curious about the covered form of the Raptora - Fareeha had objected to the sudden deployment since repairs to the suit weren't complete, and Jack had only mentioned that they'd gotten Helix to send over Fareeha's old ceremonial armor. Angela hadn't been able to decipher Fareeha's laughter.) And while the house wasn't much to look at, boasting the ugliest carpet Angela's ever seen and badly in need of some paint, it came lightly furnished and didn't seem about to collapse on them while they were sleeping.

Though Fareeha was checking on the two smaller bedrooms just to make sure of that.

Being used to missions that involved at least five other people, the house felt strangely empty to Angela, and she kept listening for the front door to open or voices to start up from one of the downstairs rooms. Without that, she was hyper aware of every sound that Fareeha made, the creak of floorboards under her feet or the moment she slammed a palm against a part of the wall that looked suspect and made Angela jump a mile.

When Fareeha walked out of the room with a satisfied nod, Angela clasped her hands behind her back so Fareeha couldn't see the way her fingers twisted together.

"No leaks or problems that I spotted," Fareeha said. "They'll do."

"So pick whichever one you want," Angela told her, watching the slight frown that appeared on Fareeha's lips, wondering if she'd object. Instead she wordlessly picked up her duffel and tossed it into the leftmost room, the smaller one that faced north.

Before she could lose her nerve, Angela picked up her own bag and walked into that same lefthand room, crossing the threshold as easily as any other step even as her nerves sang in her ears. She placed her bag next to Fareeha's and sat on the edge of the bed. "Good choice," she said, watching the woman in the doorway carefully, biting her tongue on the question of *is this okay* that she really wanted to ask.

But Fareeha was smiling and laughing, shaking her head as she stepped inside. "I have good taste," she teased, gesturing to what could have been the bed but Angela suspected was really her. She reached out, hooking her fingers into Fareeha's belt loops and tugging her in closer. She stepped in between Angela's legs as if she belonged there, leaning down and kissing her, lingering for a moment, blurring the line between them. When she straightened, she rose over Angela like the sun, like the tide, strong and undeniable and *right*. It sent a shiver of recognition through Angela, rushing its way through her limbs and ricocheting around her brain, like *deja vu* in reverse. A feeling, not that she'd been here before, but that she would be again.

"What are you thinking?" Fareeha asked quietly.

I'm falling in love with you. The thought was so automatic, so present, that Angela was afraid for a moment that she'd actually spoken it aloud. "I'm trying to remind myself that we're here officially."

Fareeha grinned. "Well—"

The insistent tone of an incoming communication rang out from the room across the hall, and both of their heads whipped toward it.

"Maybe that won't be so hard to remember after all," Fareeha sighed.

—

Angela understood Fareeha's laughter that night, when the sheet came off the Raptora armor to reveal a suit of black and gold, the falcon helmet replaced by a jackal's head. She watched Fareeha as they changed, how the black absorbed as much of the light as it reflected. The look could almost be intimidating, until she pulled the helmet on. And then it was Angela trying to hide her laughter behind her hand, her guilt only subsiding when she noticed Fareeha's toothy grin. "Not exactly the effect they were going for, right? We tried to keep the helmet off as much as possible."

"It probably looks better from farther away," Angela soothed, and they shared a smile before turning to the last pieces of their equipment. She could hear the joints of the Raptora (the Canidae? Angela wondered) hiss as Fareeha bent over to pick up her rocket launcher; Angela slipped her blaster into its holster, its weight a familiar burden. She took her staff in hand and they turned to each other, now clad in Mercy and Pharah.

"I programmed the locations into my visor," Pharah said, tapping the side of her helmet, the eyes now glowing. "Do you want to go geographically or by potential?"

The call earlier had been Hana, giving them a list of all the buildings that had changed ownership in the last year. They were going to start their survey for the Talon safe house with those; the aerial sweep they were about to do should help narrow it down further. "Geographically, starting with any nonresidential neighborhoods. It might take longer, but it should limit our flying and be easier to keep track of where we end if we have to continue this tomorrow. We can always walk through the more residential streets in daytime."

Pharah considered this, then nodded. "Longer, but efficient, and it limits our chances of being

exposed. Shall we?"

"After you," Mercy told her, gesturing to the windows and laughing at Pharah's indignant look. "We bought a house with a backyard and a fence for a reason," she muttered, leading the way down the stairs. "I'm not going to climb in and out of windows like I'm a teenager again." Later, Mercy told herself, she would have to ask for that story.

The evening was quiet, the moon and a few scattered street lamps providing enough illumination for them to hop from roof to roof in the commercial district, pointing out buildings and conversing quietly.

They returned to the house when the birds started singing, before it truly started getting light. They reported their findings - they'd found several good possibilities - as they stripped down to their flight suits. After the call, Angela changed into pajamas and fell into bed while Fareeha took a quick shower to rid herself of the smell of fuel.

Angela fell asleep to the sound of the running water.

She woke in Fareeha's arms.

After lunch (breakfast for them), they strolled through the town, hand in hand, chatting quietly about the house and how they would improve it. They seemed to wander, going wherever their feet led them, but Angela had the map of the neighborhood memorized, and knew all of the locations they needed to check out.

"We are not repainting it white," Fareeha insisted, shaking her head. She pointed to a burgundy house across the street. "Like that. What do you think of that color?"

Angela glanced at the mailbox, noting the number: this house was on their list. She took in the carefully tended garden running along the front of the house and the kids bike leaning against the fence. She shook her head. She didn't think Talon would go to that length to disguise their safe house. "Too dark. I want something cheerier."

"Fine, it's off the list," Fareeha said - message received - but her fingers tightened around Angela's. "And of course you do. But we're still not painting it white."

"White is perfectly acceptable. And then we can paint the trim something outrageous for you." She leaned over, lowering her voice. "I am not living in a blue and gold house."

"Is this still hypothetical, or should I be taking notes?" Fareeha murmured in response, and grinned wickedly when Angela straightened with flushed cheeks and hurried them down the street.

Angela checked in with Mei that night, the scientist lending her expertise at organizing data and seeing trends in it to their mission. Nothing had seemed out of the ordinary among the area they'd walked today, and so they'd decided to focus on the several warehouses that they'd surveyed the night before.

"Where is Fareeha, by the way? It's not like her to skip something mission-related. Is she okay?" Mei's concerned eyes darted around the room, as if Fareeha was standing just outside of the feed. "Oh, yes. She's just making dinner so we can eat after you and I finish up and before scouting tonight."

"Really? How wonderful!" Mei clapped her hands together with a wide smile.

Angela, bemused by the enthusiasm, shook her head. "She said she refused to live on take out and microwaved food," she said, laughing self-consciously as she gestured to herself. "And since

that's all I know how to do..."

Plus it was efficient, as Fareeha had said. They really both didn't need to be there just to say that they'd found nothing, and she trusted Angela to either decide things for both of them or to get her if she thought Fareeha's input was needed. It'd been a vote of confidence from the tactician that even Jack listened to, and Angela had been pleased just by that. But Mei was smiling like the meal was something special, like it was something grand, even as she nods an agreement with what Angela had said.

"I remember surviving several late nights with you on coffee and vending machines," she laughed. "It's sweet that she's cooking for you both, though."

Hana's face suddenly appeared in the corner of the screen, clearly leaning over from her chair in front of the computer. "I'd make you fend for yourself," she said, laughing at the exasperated sigh she got in return. "But hey, if she's wearing an apron you gotta take a pic and send it to me." Now Angela laughed. "I hate to disappoint you," she said, noticing that even Mei looked a little crestfallen as Hana shrugged and returned off-screen. "Now that all of the important things are taken care of?" she prompted gently. The conversation had definitely taken a turn for the personal, and she'd shared as much as she'd felt like. As if anyone in Overwatch was really allowed to have a private life.

After saying goodbye, still amused by her friends, she made her way downstairs to the kitchen. She returned Fareeha's brief, distracted smile before dropping into one of the chairs at the small table.

She had to admit, whatever Fareeha was making smelled delicious.

"So what did they say?" Fareeha asked after a moment, turning away from the pan on the stove. "They agreed with us. There's nothing out of the ordinary on any of the residential records either. So we'll focus on the commercial ones for now." Fareeha nodded, and an easy silence fell between them.

If she just relaxed and let her thoughts go, if she could quiet her mind and forget the several hundred pounds of military equipment in the bedroom upstairs, then this could almost be real. She inhaled, smelling garlic and chicken and onions, hearing the sizzle of the pan. She watched Fareeha, as confident and precise as in the gym, as on the battlefield, no part of her movement seeming wasted. A soft breeze floated in from the open window, and Angela wondered for a moment if this is what her life could've been if she hadn't joined Overwatch. Or if she'd been born in a time of peace instead of war.

She smiled softly at the thought, feeling slightly foolish. She had so many things that she was proud of, and though her regrets were also numerous, she doubted there was any life free of them. And if these moments were only that, only temporary, stolen for themselves between missions before they had to go be heroes, then at least she had them at all. That didn't make them less real. Just a little more precious than they might otherwise be.

"Is there something I can do to help?" she asked, a sudden restlessness urging her to not let the moment just pass so easily. And because if Fareeha really was planning on cooking most of their meals, she should probably try to do something.

"Come try this and tell me if it needs anything," Fareeha answered, reaching into a cabinet and pulling down a plate as Angela stood. She spooned out a tiny piece of chicken and some vegetables from the pan before offering it to Angela.

Grabbing a fork, Angela took half the chicken and some of the vegetables, chewing thoughtfully as she loaded the fork again. Gentle heat spread from her tongue through her mouth, and she smiled at it. "You'll probably want more spice," she guessed, holding up the fork for Fareeha. "But I think it's perfect."

She wasn't that surprised when Fareeha declined to take the fork for herself, leaning forward slightly and opening her mouth. She was more surprised when she just went with it, placing the fork in Fareeha's mouth, feeling the gentle pressure and slide of her teeth closing around the tines as Angela pulled the fork away.

The advantage of the moment, Angela thought, was that Fareeha was too busy chewing to openly laugh at her, even if her bright eyes were doing just the same.

On the rooftops that night, Pharah grabbed her arm and pulled her back from the ledge, turning her to the left and whispering into her ear. "Truck on the road, ten o'clock."

Mercy waited, focused on the area, waiting for the truck to approach close enough that her own eyes, unaided by a targeting visor, could see it. She nodded when it did, leaning into Pharah.

"What's written on the side?"

"Looks like advertising for a bakery."

"Awfully early even for them," Mercy said quietly, and Pharah nodded. They both watched in silence as the truck turned into the loading area of a warehouse. She felt Pharah glance at the building's address at the same time that she did, felt her nod. It was one of the buildings they'd singled out before.

"That's not a bakery," she said as they stopped at the loading dock and rolled up the back panel of the truck.

Pharah nodded and indicated the crate that a man carried out. "And I bet those aren't muffins."

The next words were a soft exhale. "Got them."

They had watched the men unload the truck, then pile back in and drive away. Mercy had counted: every person she'd seen arrive had left - so either there was no one guarding the place or someone was already there.

Too many questions and the approaching dawn had sent them back to the house, their own base, to report back and plan their approach.

"One thing that bothers me," Fareeha was saying, most of her Raptora suit off but her arms and legs not yet switched over. Both Jack and Winston instantly stopped their debate about caution versus aggression and focused on her. "That was a lot of cargo that they unloaded. If they already had a stash of stuff inside - and I'm assuming they do, since we'd heard about the warehouse already - we could be looking at a massive amount of stuff to get rid of."

Winston nodded, following her logic, but Jack was the one who gestured impatiently. "And?"

"The original plan was just to blow it all up?" Fareeha asked, patting her rocket launcher, and Jack nodded. "Well, if their stockpile is as big as I think it is, that would be a huge explosion."

Angela was the one who sucked in her breath, seeing where Fareeha was going before the others.

"It'd be a lot of damage. There'd be secondary explosions from whatever ammunition they have in there, even ignoring the possibility of rockets and grenades. We could get a lot of people hurt, and the police and fire responders would be the ones worst hit."

"We can't do that." Angela said as soon as Fareeha paused, though Jack and Winston surely both knew where she stood on that issue.

"But we can't just leave them with it," was Winston's gentle objection. "And if there's so much, it would be difficult to try and sabotage it all before they caught on, and that sort of thing isn't reliable enough."

Jack shook his head, rejecting the plan before they could discuss it further. "We can't bring more people in. They'll notice our increased activity and start preparing defenses." *Which is exactly why you two are there*, his downturned lips seemed to say.

“We don’t need more people,” Fareeha said. “Just one. Is Satya available?”

They slept as Jack and Winston looked into Fareeha’s proposed solution. They slept as Satya planned and practiced, devising ways to open a teleporter to a place she’d never been before.

They woke to news that the experiments were ongoing, and after breakfast they walked through the town, purposefully this time, heading for a small park they’d seen. They claimed a bench for themselves and laughed at the pigeons that gathered hopefully before wandering away. Fareeha sketched and Angela read, her head tucked against Fareeha’s shoulder, both of them jumping at every perceived buzz of a phone.

They were just discussing dinner when their phones went off for real: Satya had found a way.

“Here’s the catch,” Jack told them after they’d rushed back to the house. “It’s not as stable as her regular devices, so she highly recommends not trying to teleport anything living.”

“Highly recommends as in she’s reasonably sure it won’t kill us but there’s a chance or-“ Fareeha started, but Jack held up a hand to stop her.

“Personally I wouldn’t even put a finger in there,” he said. “You two will have to return the old-fashioned way.”

Angela found herself relaxing, and Fareeha glanced at her, apparently noticing the same thing. “That’s not such a bad thing,” she said evenly. “It might draw attention if we vanished on the same night as their things.”

“We can stay an extra day or two,” Angela added after a deliberate pause. “See how they react to discovering their stuff is gone.” She knew her expression was perfectly neutral, but Fareeha just couldn’t contain her little half smile, and Jack looked between them several times before sighing. “And somehow I almost believe you,” he said. “Though you each have a point. I’ll see if I can spare you, but no promises.”

It would’ve been ungracious to look too triumphant, but she allowed herself a smile anyway.

They dressed for the mission as soon as the sun set, and before they made their way downstairs, Mercy stopped Pharah on the landing with both hands flat against the chest plate. “If you try to pull any of that ‘don’t follow’ nonsense on me again-“

“I won’t,” Pharah reassured her, but Mercy stubbornly kept going.

“-Because there is no one else here, Pharah, and I need to know that I can trust you-“

Pharah stopped her by pressing a thumb to her lips. “You can; we’re in this together, and I won’t leave your side.” She smiled broadly, in a way that made Mercy tense. “Or should I tell you that I’ll follow you like a puppy?”

Mercy groaned, smacking the nose of Pharah’s jackal helmet, ignoring the way that only increased her laughter.

“Okay?” she asked, her thumb drifting to the corner of Mercy’s lips and lingering.

Okay, she signed. *I’m following you.*

Pharah shook her head, leading the way down the stairs. “All that time practicing and our first mission’s in the dark where we can’t see anyway,” she complained good-naturedly.

“We’ll use it next time,” Mercy replied, and then they stepped into the night.

They flew a circle around the building as Pharah scanned it, seeing if her visor could pick out any guards and shaking her head repeatedly.

“It can’t be this easy,” she muttered as they landed in the parking lot by the loading bay they’d seen the truck at.

Mercy stayed silent, hoping that it could, straining her senses for any trace of a guard. She flinched when Pharah kicked open the side door, the bang of the lock breaking seeming like it must’ve been heard for miles. But though they ducked inside, pressed themselves against the wall with weapons at the ready, there was no response. No shouts, no alarms.

They stayed there for what felt like hours but was only minutes, breathing softly and listening, Mercy looking over into the helmet’s glowing eyes as they both realized that they really were alone. The information had been good; enough so that Mercy wasn’t entirely sure she wanted to know how Overwatch had gotten it.

She pulled out her phone, texting Symmetra that they were ready and sending her a picture of the warehouse as Pharah cleared an open space in the middle before rejoining Mercy nearer the door. They both moved with sudden urgency, wanting to get this over with before being discovered.

A blue portal bloomed into existence in the exact middle of the spot Pharah had created, and Mercy nodded as she read Symmetra’s instructions. “Send one thing through first,” she said. “The least volatile thing you can find.”

Which turned out to be an unloaded rifle, and by Symmetra’s responses came through unharmed, letting them stress the system more. Mercy was not entirely comforted by the tone of all of Symmetra’s communications, a simple *Interesting* being all she got as Pharah carefully pushed through a small box of grenades.

She leaned against the wall and took a breath, reminding herself that Symmetra was in just as much danger if something suddenly went horribly wrong, but it didn’t help that much when she was watching Pharah haul around crates of weapons designed for death and dismemberment. She forced a smile when she noticed Pharah watching her, gesturing to their surroundings as an explanation for her anxiety.

But the warehouse emptied with agonizing slowness, Mercy’s nerves fraying as she waited for each response even as her heart lightened with each crate that disappeared through the portal.

It was working.

She focused more and more on the communicator, as if pure will could make things happen faster, get them out sooner, safer. When the light of the blue portal went out suddenly, she looked up, blinking as her eyes readjusted, and scanned the empty warehouse. Pharah stood still, her head bowed for a moment, before she looked up with a grin that Mercy couldn’t help but return.

They walked outside together, closing the door as best they could just to delay the discovery of the weapons’ disappearance for every minute possible, and leapt into the sky together.

They landed in the backyard, and Mercy almost fumbled the keys as she got the door unlocked. She barely waited for Pharah to walk inside before she was discarding blaster and staff, pulling Pharah’s rocket launcher out of her hands with impatience and placing it carefully on the couch before she flung herself into Pharah’s arms, giddy with relief and happiness. A success, a mission that had done something important, all without them having to fire a shot or needing her healing abilities.

Pharah laughed, triumph and pride in her voice even if her exhaustion was clear in the slight tremble of her arms around Mercy's waist.

"Let's go check in officially," she said, "and then sleep for a week or so."

Mercy just took her hand and led her upstairs, but the holoscreen already held a message for them, and when they played it Jack's firm voice filled the room:

Good work, you two. Enjoy your day off.

"Well, one's better than nothing," Fareeha said as she removed her helmet, shaking her hair out. Angela sighed as she divested herself of her halo and wings, rolling her shoulders as they were freed from the weight. She looked over and hissed in sympathy as Fareeha took off the left arm of the Raptora, noticing how swollen her arm was and reaching out to stop her from swapping out the regular prosthetic. But Fareeha acted before she could speak, settling the arm with the ease of long practice and catching her hand in her own.

"Scold me later, Doctor Ziegler," she said, her voice warm and smooth, her expression fond as she met Angela's eyes. "I want to hold you tonight."

Well.

That was hard to argue with.

"Anything else you'd like to do on your time off?" Angela managed, and Fareeha's smile widened at the concession in the change of topic.

However, she shrugged at the question. "Just relax and spend time with you," she said. "Did you have something in mind?"

The smile started as just a gentle curve of her lips, but grew as she considered her answer, turning the words over in her mind. "I want to sleep in," Angela said, taking Fareeha's hand and placing it on her waist as she stepped closer. "I want to wake up with you next to me. I want to lie in the sunlight and listen to you breathe. I want to kiss you when you wake up and hear you say that you love me."

Fareeha's eyes had gone dark, and she breathed a laugh as she pulled Angela flush against her, ignoring the fact that they were still half-dressed. "Confident, aren't you?" she murmured, teeth flashing in a grin. "And why should I say that?"

"Because you do," Angela said quietly, simply, knowing it to be true. "Am I wrong?"

"No. You're not." The teasing was gone from her voice, and the soft seriousness of her voice brought a gasp to Angela's lips.

It was simple to put her arms around Fareeha's neck. It was simple to press her lips against hers in a chaste kiss.

Pulling back and looking into Fareeha's eyes was as simple - and as hard - as folding her Valkyrie wings into a dive over the ocean. "I love you," she said, feeling the same exhilarating rush at finally saying it, at the light in Fareeha's face, at the joyful way that Fareeha picked her up and crushed her to her chest - "Put me down, Fareeha! Don't stress your-"

And then Fareeha was kissing her, and it really didn't matter anymore.

—

The thought came to her unbidden as she woke slowly, in the sun, in Fareeha's arms. Carefully, she traced the tattoo under her eye.

I am a bird, and she is the sky.

Angela closed her eyes, and listened to Fareeha breathe.

Chapter End Notes

And thus we come to an end! Thank you so much, everyone! I cannot even begin to tell you how much I've appreciated all the feedback and your patience.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!